

SKETCHING THE SOUTH, A VISUAL ESSAY

ESBOÇANDO O SUL, UM ENSAIO VISUAL

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Abstract: The article presents the author's perspective on several Souths perceived by his own observation sketches. Therefore this proposition for an article is more of a visual essay and is based in 35 images². The 'South' is conceptualized in historical and contemporary issues related with architecture and art. It is argued that the exercise of sketching the environment with no apparent purpose is in fact creating the basis for visual essays that help to position an author in a psychological, geographical, historical position. The visual essay is also the way to convey that position for the others interpretations. From Americo Vespucci *Mundus Novus* and Thomas More a link between Epicureanism and Stoicism and different visions of South is established.

Key-words: sketches, visual essay, existential space, South

Resumo: O artigo apresenta a perspectiva do autor sobre vários Sul percebidos por seus próprios esboços de observação. Portanto, este artigo é mais um ensaio visual e é baseado em 35 imagens². O 'Sul' é conceptualizado em questões históricas e contemporâneas relacionadas com a arquitetura e a arte. Argumenta-se que o exercício de esboçar o ambiente sem finalidade aparente está, na verdade, criando a base para ensaios visuais que ajudam a posicionar um autor em uma posição psicológica, geográfica, histórica. O ensaio visual também é a forma de transmitir essa posição para as demais interpretações. De *Mundus Novus* de Américo Vespucci e da *Utopia* de Thomas More, é estabelecida uma ligação entre epicurismo e estoicismo e diferentes visões do sul.

Palavras-chave: esboços, ensaio visual, espaço existencial, Sul

This I take to be because the south winds are ever blowing there, and especially that which we call Eurus, which is the same to them as the Aquilo is to us.

Amerigo Vespucci, *Mundus Novus*

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² All illustrations are by the author.

1. Introduction: Visual Essays

This is a visual essay. Such object aims to trigger a reflexive process determined by the capture, organization and display of a group of images.

The essay introduces, in a first instance, an aesthetic appreciation of the drawings which resists any scientific reading. Yet, in its more pure sense, introduces also an educated point of view, that surely needs a background justification.

I taught Drawing to future architects for 16 years and I have been teaching several visual culture courses in Design programs since 2000. One particular feature of visual essays is that not only they are part of the reflexive process of the author but also can trigger on others, accordingly with their background, a similar reflexive process. In all this process refers to what constitute a fundamental exercise of taking part in the world in order to be able to transform it. It constitutes an anticipation of any method that will conduce to a specific design. However, this creation of narratives and the constant elaboration of visual reports solidifies a knowledgeable attitude on the environment re-positioning the architect/designer in a historical and geographical position.

2. What South, where South?

In order to start this journey we must bring on some companions. The first is Christian Norberg-Schulz (1981) and his notion of existential space. He asks Heidegger's help to stress that humans are in the world based on the notion that existence is spatial (NORBERG-SCHULZ, 1981, p. 46). He defines levels of this existential existence. This visual essay is mostly developed at what he calls the urban level but starts at the geographical, goes through landscape and finishes at the house. (NORBERG-SCHULZ, 1981, p. 47-53). Important companions are Denise Scott Brown, Robert Venturi and Steven Izenour with their approach in *Learning from Las Vegas* (1985), often resulting from visual essays. There is also a reference to Donald Schon's "*Reflective Practitioner*" but only to place this work before the teleology observed by Schon. Reflection starts before any design problem. The practitioner must practice. Must practice the reflective attitude even when the project is not on.

Reflecting on the idea of south is, therefore, included in that pre-existing existential stance in which the author uses an observation and representational ability to form a conscious intellectual proposition that will be the backbone of interventions and designs to come. This has, naturally to be enhanced by readings that may have been triggered by drawing and observing.

When researching for my PhD Thesis (CÔRTE-REAL, 1999) I produced over 600 sketches mainly in Italy. The book that came out from that thesis (CÔRTE-REAL, 2001) shows 60 of those. The thesis was about Drawing and Architecture and how a new concept (*Disegno*) had changed the process of legitimating the endeavor of projecting buildings that claimed to be “architecture”. In 2009 I published a book on travel drawings (CÔRTE-REAL, 2009a) and I have been keeping a blog since then (CÔRTE-REAL, 2009b) where I publish sequences of drawings with very little text. Each sequence is an essay that is offered to the percipient to construct further on.

I had contact with this idea of Visual Essay in the text “The Visual Essay- Reflexivity in the design process” by Anke Coumans (2004). Although presenting most visual essays as photographic, it was a great help to understand how apparently idle observation drawing can make an important role on the reflexive process of designing. But as stressed before, readings are, also apparently not related with the design process, but related with the exploration of the existential interrogations of the author, are crucial.

One character that comes to my mind when we speak about the South is the Italian Amerigo Vespucci. He had his name immortalized in the name of a continent and more especially in the name of one country. Regardless of a mythography based on another Italian, Cristoforo Colombo, as the European who “discovered” the continent, it is Vespucci that offered his name to the new world. No other continent is so clearly separated in north and south.

This enormous mass of land unknown to the Europeans is the continent that more clearly is geographically consistently divided in south and north. South America and North America are almost independent continents and since 1914 *de facto* separated.

Amerigo’s travels were mostly in the South, especially the one that gave him fame because of his letter to Lorenzo Pietro di Medici translated to Latin and printed. Opposed to Colombo’s claim that he had arrived in India, Vespucci’s letter asserted that what was “found” was a new world, a *Mundus Novus* (VESPUCCI, 1504) based on the explorations he conducted in what will become known as Brazil in the future.

We will get back to this in the end of this text but, let us, for now, note that Southern Europeans tended to occupy the southern part of the continent and northern Europeans the northern part. A division born in Europe endured and persisted in the new world.

3. Places in South

So, we must go back to the origin of this dual perception on its place of origin, Europe.

Let's start with my own country. Although being the most western country of continental Europe and having its most eastern tip west of the most western tip of England, it is designated as being part of Southern Europe whereas England is known for being western european. There is something in the “*southernness*” of Portugal stronger than its “*westernness*”.

I often ask my students if there is a South Pole and a North Pole why there isn't a West Pole and an East Pole? The smartest will say that the Earth spins around a north-south axis and not around an east-west one. But, I argue that there are countries that claim to be of the West and others of the East, and some of the Middle East and even others of the Far-East and some movies depict live in the Far-West. It is, in this case, a psycho-geographical-political-historical situation since, as my students point out, no east-west axis exists. Apparently there is also psycho-geographical-political-historical situation that labels places as south or north in the same way as labels west and east. It is so much so that Barcelona and Porto claim to be the northerner poles of Spain and Portugal and yet they stand geographically south of Marseille, the epitome of France's south. The fact that the absolute north is, like the absolute south, a frozen place doesn't help to differentiate the two.

Shaped as a vertical rectangle, and roughly divided in Atlantic climate and Mediterranean climate, Portugal has its own north and south areas dramatized by the change in landscape. This has been exacerbated by successive different occupants for as far back as the romanization times.

The architectural consequences are enhanced by a dominance of granite in the North and limestone and marble in the South. Wood buildings are almost irrelevant in traditional architecture confined to a stretch by some of the western shores.

In Lisbon were the southern oceans explorations started a building serves as a eulogy of such endeavor: The Jerónimos Monastery (Figure 1).



Figure 1 - View of The Jerónimos Monastery from Praça do Império and the eastern entrance from Praça do Império, Lisbon, June 2018. Author

Its Church and Cloister were designed and started to be built in 1500 in a style labelled as Late Gothic. One may consider that, in a sense, this style called Manuelino, referring to the king Manuel I, is more of an anti-gothic by its dematerialization of structural vertical elements, again as in the Romanesque style, embed in thick walls, by the flattening of the ceilings, and mostly by the introduction of classical emblems and creative maritime and exotic vegetal decorations. Its construction is bulk and resilient and so it was one of the few major buildings that resisted the giant 1755 earthquake.

The Jerónimos building stands physically dominating the most western neighborhood of Lisbon, Belém. Its scale dwarfed buildings in the vicinity, even the elegant presidential palace nearby. In 1941 the site was chosen to host the fascist exhibition of the Portuguese world creating what was then named the Empire Square and leaving the monument to the Portuguese discoveries and a few buildings such as the museum of popular art and several nautical sports facilities to accompany the Monastery. More recently, in 1992, a comparable sized building was erected to hold the first Portuguese Presidency of the European Union, Belém Cultural Centre (Figure 2).

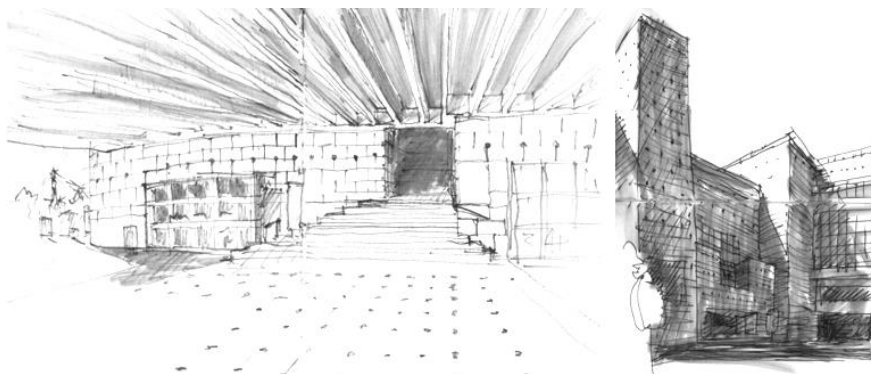


Figure 2 - Centro Cultural de Belém, inside the main entrance and inside the first internal square, Lisbon, June 2019. Author

It was designed by Vittorio Gregotti and Manuel Salgado with interiors design by Daciano da Costa. Gregotti's approach was not monumental. The building recognizes Jerónimos dominance in the large square. Quietly underlines symbolically the end of the empire cycle in favor of a European cycle.

In 1998 another urban challenge was placed by the eastern renovations of a large obsolete harbor and industrial facilities to host the EXPO 98 world exhibition. Either unconsciously or deliberately this building site would start a dialogue with its western counterpart: the Belém area. A mental polarity expressed in the outer political geographical limits of west and east.

From all the new buildings, one stands out: Portugal Pavilion authored by Álvaro Siza Vieira (Figure 3).

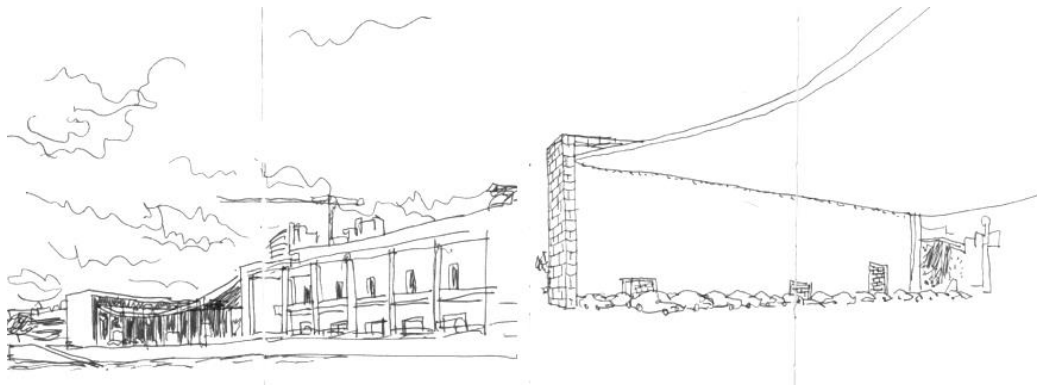


Figure 3 - View of the Pavilhão de Portugal and view of the flap on the South side of Pavilhão de Portugal, Parque das Nações, Lisbon, June 2010. Author

The comparison with Jerónimos monastery is irresistible almost 500 years apart. Both buildings announce the city at its outer limits. So, Álvaro Siza had to deal with Jerónimos' charisma symbolizing the beginning of the discoveries and its own building symbolizing Portugal's new cycle in a globalized society. Whereas in Jerónimos the engineering ingenuity allows quite delicate columns for an almost flat ceiling in the interior, in Belém, in the Pavilion it is the delicate subtil concrete catenary that covers an open space that figuratively and metaphorically corresponds to Jerónimos cloister.

The three buildings and their surroundings deal with the geographical position of Lisbon that for centuries had faced the South both in its "European reputation" as in its maritime vocation.

3.1 The Greeks, The Romans - From center to south

The cover of J.M. Roberts' (1996) "*Penguin History of Europe*" depicts one corner of the Parthenon. One may imagine the discussion about choosing the right image for a cover of such book that wants to appeal to the greatest number of people. The result is the picture of a building that is related not only with the idea of Europe but moreover with its origin.

It is what Caradoc, Lawrence Durrell's architect character in the novel *Tunc* says in a drunken discourse on the Acropolis: "(...) Time should stimulate us with significant eloquence on the memories that linger here. Where are they, the first ones, our ancestors". (DURRELL, s.d., p. 67)

There is a centrality on being the origin of something. Certainly for the ancient greeks Athens' sacred places devoted specially to their special goddess placed the Acropolis was not the South but the centre (Figure 4).



Figure 4 - Night view of the Acropolis from Avissinia Cafe and Early morning in the Acropolis, Athens, February 2020

Caradoc goes further: (...) — Anyone may build, put a stone above another, but who is able to determine the gigantic personality of such work of art?" (DURREL, s.d. p. 68)

Not long ago, I addressed this question as part of a broader reflection about cities and their high places materialized as works of art (—— 2007). Although the Acropolis still appeals to us as an urban work of art, it looks like a ground zero of depletion and destruction (Figure 4). And this seem to enhance the lure of the place for tourism.

Moving west, Rome has also cultivated its higher places. The Capitol preserved and renewed in the XVI century is the epitome of such collective investment.

One thing that comes to one's mind is the image of the city on the hills or the city and the hills as something pertaining to the South (Figure 5).

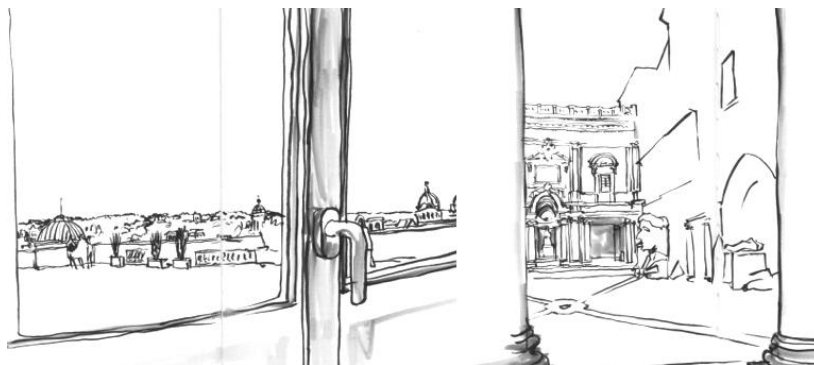


Figure 5 - Capitoline Museums, View from the cafeteria and View towards the main courtyard, Rome, November 2017

If we think about the European Capital cities, in the North, only Oslo is hilly. In the South only Madrid is not that hilly (but still lumpy). Paris is quite an interesting hybrid, flat but with one major hill, Montmartre, and an artificial one: the Eiffel Tower. This creates a scenic flavor that offers views and contemplation places that favor the touristic obsession with images. The high view provides the tourist with the overall

image, a cherished life 3D map ready to be flattened by drawing, photography or video. The city of visual delight is therefore consistent with the narrative of working industrial North versus *leisuresque* South.

In the Capitoline Museums (Figure 5) we could rate the presence of tourism at about 50% occupation. But there is a place, The Galleria Nazionale d' Arte Moderna (Figure 6) with a tourist occupation close to zero. Here, an Italian cultural elite prevail. At the restaurant, one Italian elderly gentleman asked us where were we from? When we answered "*Lisbonna*, Portugal" he replied: "Thank god you are not one of those barbaric anglo-saxons".



Figure 6 - Lunch at the National Gallery of Modern Art Restaurant's terrace, Rome, November 2017

This aristocratic centre had another aristocratic south in Naples (Figure 7) a royal capital city and Capri (Figure 8), Tiberius, the second Roman emperor retirement place. The Island become a tourist trap. People should refrain to visit. It can be observed from Massa Lubrense watching the boats flow back and forth.

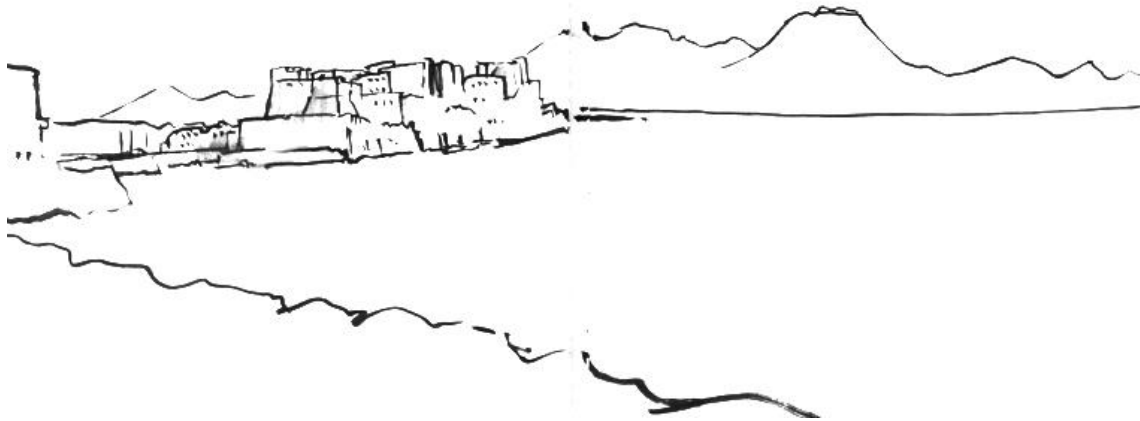


Figure 7 - View of *Castel dell'Ovo*, Naples, January 2017

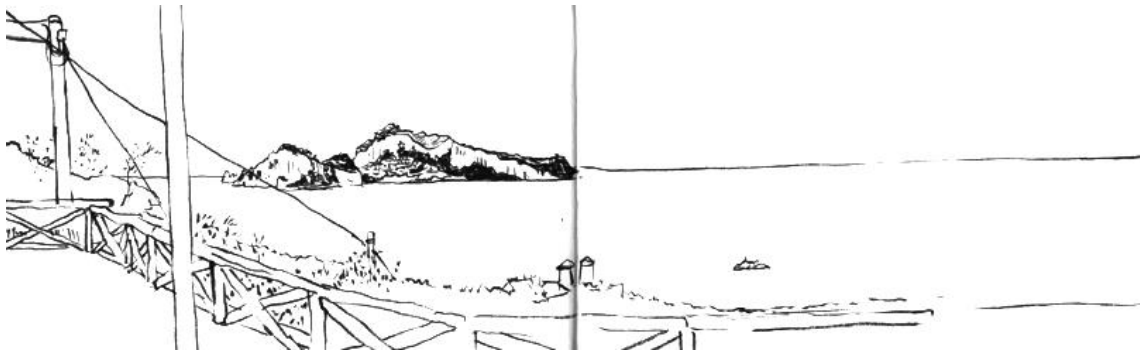


Figure 8 - View of Capri and the Sorrentino Bay from Massa Lubrense, Torre Cangiani Agroturism, January 2017

Naples offers urban palaces (Figure 9) bigger than any others in Italy also in bigger number. Today the palaces are divided and divided are hive like inhabited since lost was the Kingdom of Two Sicilies. The budget tourist thanks the transformation of some parts of them into little hotels (Figure 9) and Airbnb apartments.

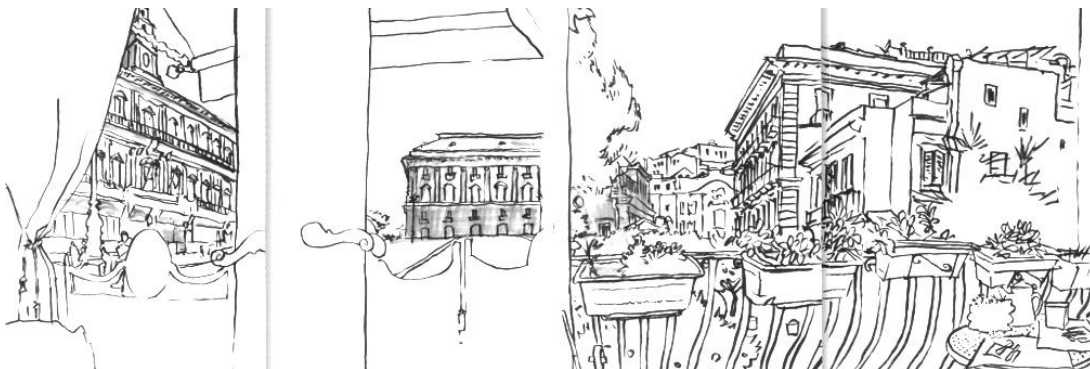


Figure 9 - The Royal Palace viewed from *Gambrinus* and breakfast at Bellini B&B, Naples, January 2017

Moving southwest, Pompeii ruins (Figure 10), probably the most famous ruin in the world, reminds us of a megalopolis area that before the great eruption of 79 AD included *Paleopolis*, *Neapolis*, Pompeii and Herculaneum. We can imagine the perception of the Greek colonists conquered by the rough Romans coming from the North in a movement that would be repeated and repeated throughout the centuries. On these places a book stands out on how tourism started to engulf the area, *The Volcano Lover* by Susan Sontag (1992).

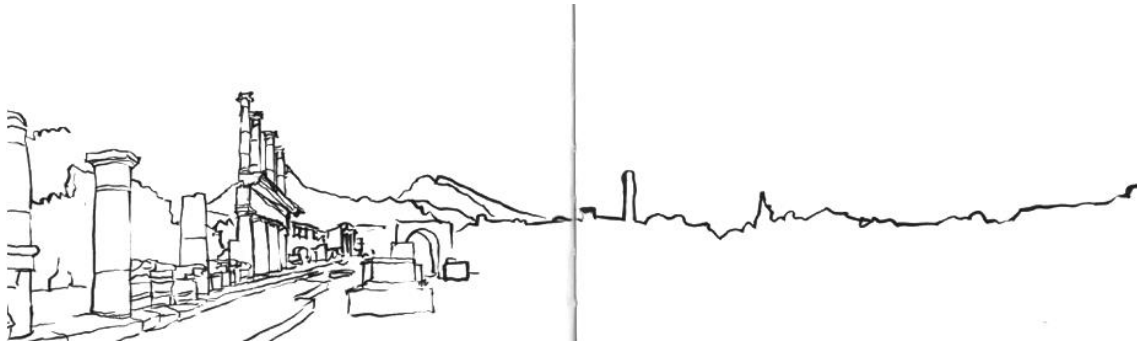


Figure 10 - Fatigued View of the Forum, Pompeii, January 2017

Further south Ravello (Figure 11) again remind us of this aristocratic perception enhanced by the visits to villa Cimbrone and villa Rufolo that offer a startling contrast with the memory of northern Palladian Villas.



Figure 11 - A coffee before entering Villa Rufolo, Ravello, January 2017

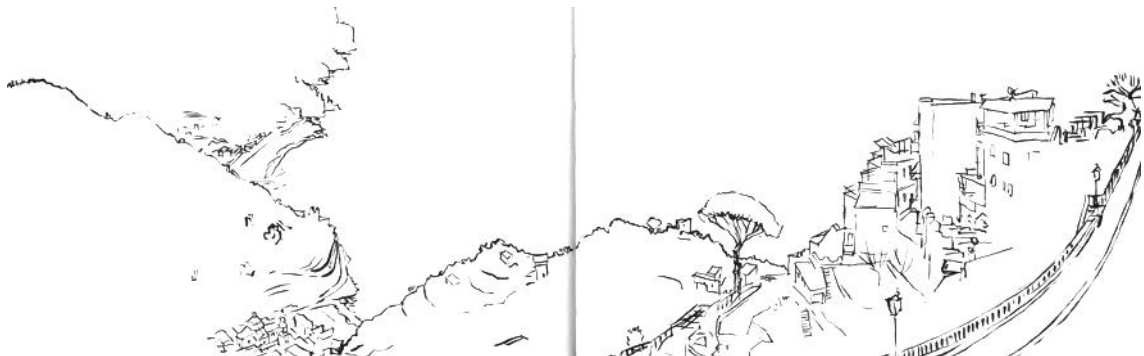


Figure 12 - View from a room at Hotel Parsifal, Ravello, January 2017

This perception is helped by a dramatic scenery (Figure 12). Again, this southern obsession with building on hills is contrasting with northern plains. What was once a defense necessity becomes a touristic marvel. Nature by its orographic caprices characterizes the South settlements.

3.2. True vs Literary South - Epicureans vs Stoics

Further south, Nature also plays hard with a city: Rio de Janeiro (Figure 13). The perception of Rio is one of an enormous human construction fighting a war against Nature but continuously losing that war.

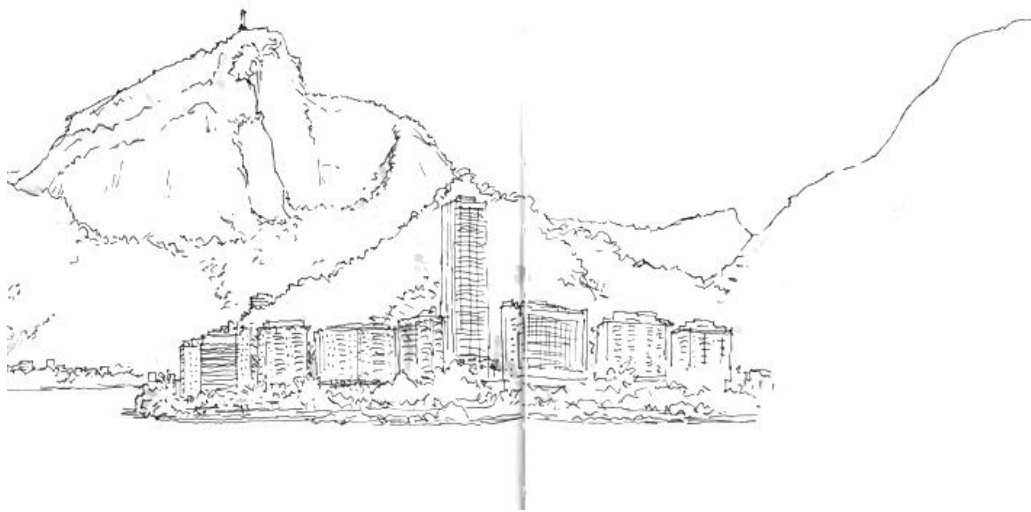


Figure 13 - View over Lagoa Rodrigo de Freitas, Ipanema, Rio de Janeiro, October 2013

Rio reminds us of Vespucci first reports about the New World made on the observation of original Brazilians:

- (...) "The women as I have said go about naked and are very libidinous;
- (...) "They live together without king, without government, and each one is his own master."
- (...) "Beyond the fact that they have no church, no religion and are not idolaters, what more can I say? They live according to nature, and may be called Epicureans rather than Stoics." (VESPUCCI,[1504] 1916, p.6)

Although the first sentence can be instantly related with Le Corbusier's depictions of black and brown Brazilian women in his sketchbooks (BENTON, T. et. al., 198, B4-283, B4-284), the following sentences have and should had at the time a strong political cultural consequence. In our times, accordance with Nature is clearly striking but I would like to underline the comparison of Epicureans and Stoics.

I like to underline that this sentence may have struck Thomas More, as many others, included in *Mundus Novus* (VESPUCCI, 1504) published and circulating in Europe in intellectual circles. More's *Utopia* (1516) is an exercise on the possibility that further south Europeans may find a Stoic society. I like to think about this book More's response to *Mundus Novus*. Let's be clear that he establishes the relation of his text with Vespucci's text in the beginning of the book when he presents the "narrator" of the story:

For this same Raphaell Hythlodaye (for this his name) is very well learned in the *Latine* tongue: but *profoude* and excellent in the *Greke* language. Wherein he ever bestowed more study then in the *Latine*, because he had *geven himselfe* holy to the study of Philosophy. *Wherof* he knew that *ther is nothyng extante* in *Latine*, that is to *anye* purpose, *fauynge* a fewe of *Senecaes*, and *Ciceroes dooynges*. His *patrimonye* that he was borne unto, he *lefte* to his *brethern* (for he is a *Portugall* borne) and for the desire that he had to see, and *knowe* the *farre Countreyes* of the *worlde*, he *ioyned himselfe* in company with *Amerike Vespuce*, and in the. iii. last voyages of those. iiii. that be *nowe* in *printe*, and *abrode* in every *mannes handes*, he continued *styll* in his company, *sauyng* that in the last voyage he came not home *agayne* with him. (MORE 1551, pp. 29-30)

Hythlodaye (a Greek name meaning 'a peddler of nonsense') travelled further south after leaving his companion 'Vespuce' to find Utopia (as we all know, a Greek name meaning 'without place').

I relate this dichotomy between Epicurean and Stoics with Aesthetics and Ethics, *Novus Mundus* and *Utopia*; symbolized by Rio de Janeiro and S. Paulo in the same Brazil that Vespucci explored.

Symbolically Niemeyer's Niterói Museu of Art (Figure 14), as an architectural gesture seeks a possible perfect curve not to closed, not to open, an homage to classical perception in the shape of a chalice.

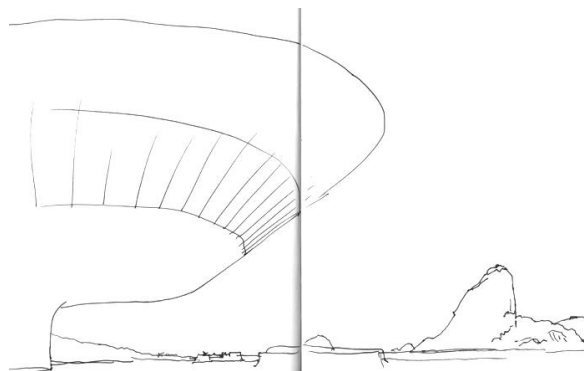


Figure 14 - View of Niterói Museum of Contemporary Art by Oscar Niemeyer, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, October 2013

Further to the South (in an inverted movement in relation with the northern hemisphere), São Paulo is almost the opposite of Rio. Down there the artificial is winning the war against Nature (Figure 15).

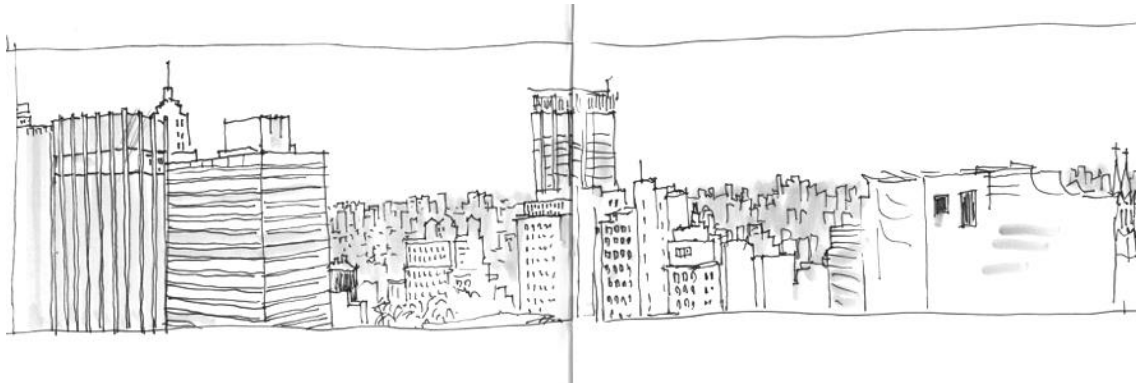


Figure 15 - View between two irritating brise-soleil from the room at Novo Hotel in the former building of *Jornal Estado de São Paulo* “*Estadão*”. São Paulo, October 2013

Verticalization looks overwhelmingly out of control. But before the present situation Oscar Niemeyer designed the COPAM building (Figure 16) and there it stands as the petrified example of a possible Utopia to be built in the South (being this south the ‘other side’ of the world).

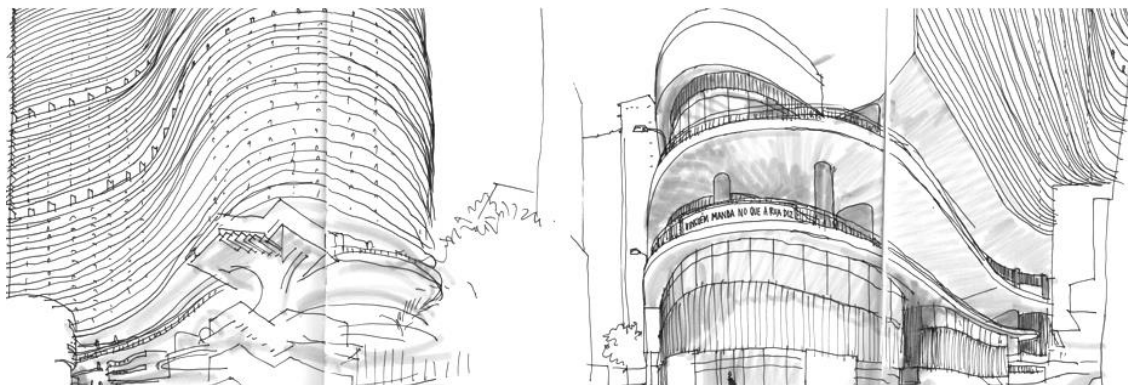


Figure 16 - Views of COPAM building by Oscar Niemeyer. São Paulo, October 2013

Here, COPAN's curve offer a variety to its apartments, an Unité d'Habitation that can dance (Figure 16). Ironically, by the introduction of two continuous horizontal *brise-soleil* on each level, the building looks much higher. Such Utopia was, of course, materialized as possibility by Brasília, sibling of Amaurot, Utopia's capital. The description of this city indirectly narrates the arrival of Design in the English language. Thomas More wrote his work in Latin:

*Nam totam hanc urbis figuram, iam inde ab initio **descriptam ab ipso Utopo ferunt**. Sed ornatum, caeterumque cultum, quibus unius aetatem hominis haud suffectum uidit, posterites adiiciendum reliquit.* (MORE, 1516, p. 131, 132)

This was translated by Ralph Robinson in 1551 as:

For they saye that *kinge* Utopus him *selfe*, even at the first beginning appointed, and **drewe** furth the platte *fourme* of the *citie* into this fashion and figure that it *heth nowe*, but the gallant garnishing, and the *beautifull settinge furth* of it, *wherunto* he sawe that one *mannes* age would not suffice: that he left to his *posteritie*.(p. 79)

And was translated by Gilbert Burnet in 1639 as:

“So that he who founded the town seems to have taken care of nothing more than of their gardens; for they say the whole scheme of the town was **designed** at first by Utopus, but he left all that belonged to the ornament and improvement of it to be added by those that should come after him, that being too much for one man to bring to perfection.”

What was **drawn** in 1551 become **designed** in 1638. It is irresistible a comparison with Brasília, drawn and designed to be developed to bring dwelling to perfection.

However, in the new center of São Paulo, where helicopters fly over every second carrying the rich avoiding the ground traffic, a jewel stands. Lina Bo-Bardi's MASP, the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (Figure 17) hangs suspended also as a memory of such delayed Utopia. This originally Italian architect, an émigré, represents the straight response to Le Corbusier's objectified mulatas. Hers aesthetical ethics would be the symbol also of a struggle for a New Utopia in the South.

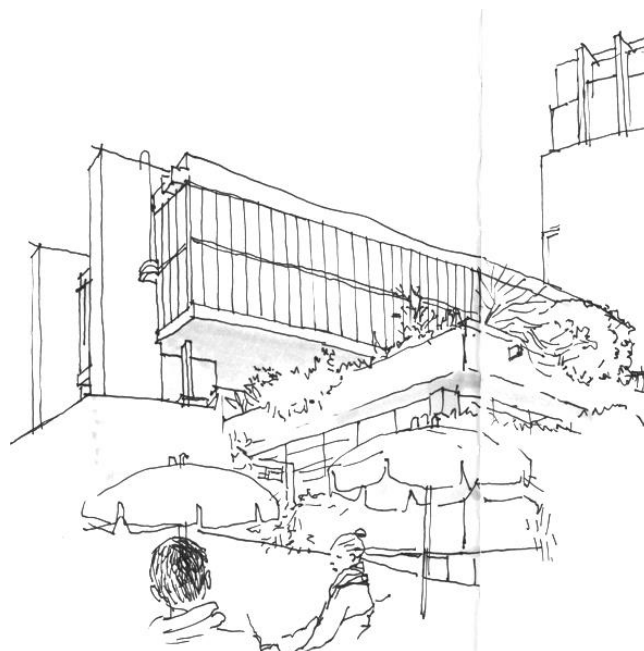


Figure 17 - View of MASP, Museum of Art of São Paulo building by Lina Bo-Bardi. São Paulo, October 2013

4. Epilogue - Conclusions?

Niemeyer's Utopia was a concrete one in its double sense. Bardi's Utopia full circled with Vespucci. There was a new architecture to be built in the South America that engages Nature like no other. Bardi's approach to the competition to design Centro Cultural de Belém (FERRAZ, 1994, pp. 306-307) in Lisboa, twenty years after MASP, shows an iconoclast south facing its original north. The drawings are in color, vibrant and always looking for the vegetal as an integral part of architecture. The somber winner of the competition, Gregotti's Design stands as symbol of a resisting ethic not very interested in succumb to epicureanism. The possibility of such Utopia further south, I found in Florianópolis (Figure 18). A large island could claim such spirit but hardly could hold 50 cities as the island of Utopia would.

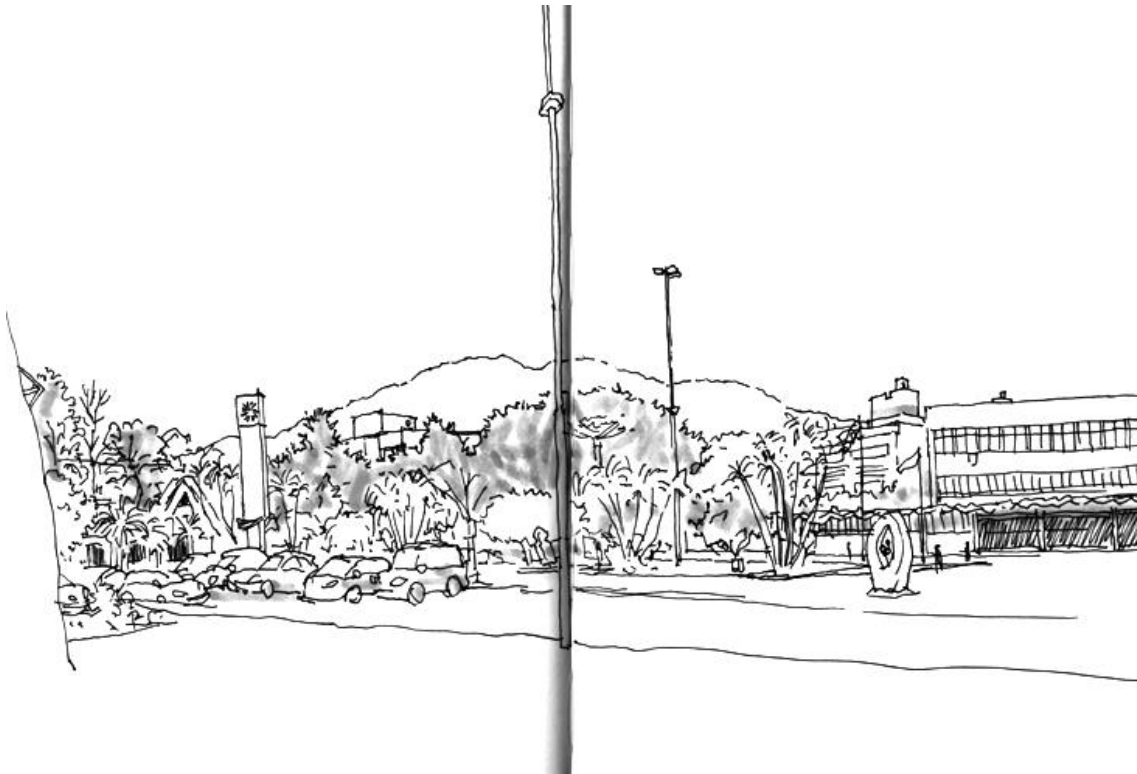


Figure 18 - Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, view of the main building, Florianópolis, November 2013

In 2013, being part of the ABEG conference, I understood that the meaning of Utopia, regardless of north or south came down to people, kindhearted people interested in knowledge and the progress of their academic interests.

So this visual essay ends with the persons I heard speaking and listening to others speaking remembering that all Utopias drawn or built have to do with people.



Figure 19 - Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, People in ABEG 2013, November 2013

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Gilson Braviano that invited me to give the inaugural lecture in Graphica 2013 in Florianópolis. From that encounter, Graphica travelled to Lisboa in the following edition. This article is still a follow-up from that invitation.

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