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The speed of utopia: a Visual Essay.

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The speed of utopia

We walk through the streets of any Portuguese city. There are buildings from various historical eras. We take photographs of space and time. It is not easy to interpret the reality. There are obvious contradictions, spatial paradoxes. I believe it is important to avoid value judgements, or labels, or to find adjectives that make superfluous distinctions about types of architecture. Permanence emanates from the ground. There is an urban design that has endured since the origins of the city. Buildings are maintained, abandoned, torn down, rebuilt, but on the ground, what is left is the void of the lines of communication that united all the buildings. Decoding these lines, so difficult to interpret with photography, is the bridge that connects us to a very distant past. This is what makes cities unique, their identifying mark, sheltering humanity in a pre-existing topography. It is the principle of utopia.

There is a desire to be in, to get to know, to photograph all cities. But what does this movement through every continuous and unlimited city surrender to us? There is an ever-larger set of images. There is an archive that grows, that wishes to be the mirror, to make accessible a multidimensional visuality that is so difficult to capture. To create new layers of reality, when the photograph ceases to be an image and assimilates the flow of space-time.

There is a severity in this exercise, a kind of intrusion into foreign territories. We enter strange worlds, which do not reveal themselves directly. Domestic spaces, not private,

are not visited by strangers. This is a journey that reveals the other side of places. Sometimes neglected, sometimes with delineated façades. The order we are seeking is no longer the one our eyes show us when we walk through the more recent peripheral streets, in an increasingly dense toponymy, like another layer of urban life.

The mind of cities is like walking, drawing, writing, building. The simultaneous beginning and end of a desire for population. Entropy in practice and, in this sense, a dizzying journey that, nowadays, travels across all periods of life, of history, a glimpse of a rare planet. Disintegrating acceleration, fertile or deadly, of the boldest traveller. To peer into unknowable abysses with dreams of returning. To write an account of impossibilities. A work of art, a poem, about the hidden rubble of the older city, beneath our feet. Compact floor, interpreted by ideas of freedom.

The speed of utopia is the progressive desire to understand places as an intangible paradise that we can reach. As we come closer to this endeavour, we leave an increasingly dense trail of information, an increasingly complex image, like successive geological strata of sedimentary rocks. We exist in this increasingly intricate game-dialogue. Everything we do in search of stability seems to result in the opposite. Adversity seeking punctuated equilibrium. A movement in which we want to question, or even abandon, past models of knowledge, of the interpretation of life and the Universe, to become fully immersed in this fascinating entropic movement. A look that becomes knowledge. And knowledge is an intangible mode of architecture. A house, a neighbourhood, an entire city that always reaches a place nearby. This is the history of life in which primordial intact Nature, *pre Homo sapiens,* comes together into a bigger city, as part of a continuous and unique, erratic, evolutionary-creative process.

To develop an urban visual atlas, as if it could be the translation of all human knowledge, which unfolds limitlessly. Cities are an immense and never-ending puzzle, dynamic, permanently interacting with the world. Each image is a coded fragment of reality, continuously spreading into other representations, into other concepts, into other architectural possibilities. A weird game of continual loss. We seek order, but generate more and more entropy. The utopia of a complete, well-balanced city, where time slows down, where we re-establish primordial ties with its origins. But none of this exists. Cities are biological organisms, which respond to the same laws of life and the matter-energy of the Universe. What happens on Earth is a continuous and random evolutionary process in which one species, *Homo sapiens*, slowly gains a huge competitive advantage over all the others and asserts itself by its strong influence on the fleeting time that follows.

To seek an area of freedom, detachment from the entire organic evolutionary process. Cities as a synthesis of the activities of life. Architecture as a means of experimenting with the future. The mediated drawing, the project, which is introduced by technology, is a remarkable invention. There is a link between art, sensitive production, and science. When everything is the same, unlike the differentiations made by epistemological categories. The expression of a truth that allows us to hope, openness to the future. Conservatism is a way of abandoning the future, it means being afraid of the inevitable, as opposed to the whole game that brought us to the present. Randomness, an enormous density of unexpected things, errors, permanent experimentation with all the possibilities. Beyond lies an ocean of darkness.

In this vortex, with a strong wind in our faces, we look back. We only attempt, now, to understand the present, as we observe the street of the past. In the geological and biological history of the planet we inhabit, what other invention is there that allows us a moment of tranquillity, to interrupt the acceleration of the present? I set off again on the path, leaving behind a clearing, a sporadic shelter. Ahead lies a never-ending journey. It began four billion years ago, with the simplest organic molecules, when the most complex phenomenon in the Universe came into being: life. A concrete journey that arises from the earth, of an immense curiosity for knowledge of the labyrinth we inhabit. There is no need to look for the speed of utopia in distant geographies far from home.

Final remarks

More than a rigid methodological discipline, in which we create discourse from bibliographic sources, this text was sketched in notebooks in the early hours. Words arise from a series of indeterminate references, of fragmented and undisciplined reading, of music, fragments of films, fragments of conversation in unpredictable daily life. Any time, any place. The entire world before the cities. Phrases that appear on the surface of a series of more than 150,000 photographs taken in 2024, in search of the 159 Portuguese cities. These recent photographs are part of a much larger archive, which, from a small territory, the space that is Portugal today, reflects an entire planet. Images and words of reflection. Pieces of an immense puzzle, fleeting and elusive, of which we are far from seeing a coherent image.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25



Figure 26



Figure 27



Figure 28



Figure 29



Figure 30



Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 33



Figure 34



Figure 35



Figure 36



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