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CORPO, CRÍTICA E CRIATIVIDADE NO ESTUDO DA CIDADE BODY, CRITICISM AND CREATIVITY IN THE STUDY OF THE CITY

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Abstract

To think about the city is to consider it as dynamic and complex. The university an essential element in the architect's basic education career, taking its constant updating as a commitment and challenge. Understanding the last century intellectual advances in several fields of knowledge, this article deals with contemporary ways of thinking, which point to the disciplinary complicity and the notion of uncertainty to think about its repercussions in the teaching field. For this purpose, speeches of historians, sociologists, a poet, and a mathematician are mentioned to frame methodological issues. Their combination with artistic and philosophical concepts take autonomy as the foundation for the production of knowledge, the body as an instrument to enhance urban perception, and subjectivity as a creative means of interpretation. Therefore, going opposite to the academic tradition on its teaching routine which tends towards a strict disciplinary debate, it accepts research, teaching, and learning as processes and the city as possibilities, just as the diversity itself of looking at it.

Keyword: City, Method, Interdisciplinarity, Body and uncertainty

1 Interdisciplinary intersections in the criticism formation/critical training

In all determinations, the next day is the master of the previous day. The experience is the universal master, underneath it, everyone learns at its expense; battles teach the soldier, ruins, the architect, shipwrecks, the Pilot (Bluteau, 1721, our translation).

The production of the city arises from ways of seeing the world. This is a dynamic view, and culture and time report its variations and changes. To architects and urban planners, understanding the context of the appropriation of the space is an important challenge to be faced but often they do not seem prepared for the concerns that the city insists on provoking¹.

In University, the future architect is involved by a lot of information that intends to translate urban dynamics, explaining them through several perspectives and promoting the exercise of facing them. It is a center for intellectual and financial investment in research, extension, publicizing, and discussion activities in countless forums of multiple approaches. In the core of this production of knowledge, the subjects of disciplinary complicity (Brandão, 2006) and randomness (Taleb, 2016) are discussed to enhance the comprehension of the cities' complex realities and different attitudes towards them. Then arises questions about the impacts of this university update on its own teaching and learning routine.

The school is a center that works by organizing and, as a consequence, shaping perceptions. The Architecture and Urbanism curriculum encompass historical, artistic, philosophical, environmental, mathematical contents, among many others. However, to what extent does the future architect recognize the moments of intersection between these various fields of knowledge? For example, do they pay attention to the meaning of the geometric composition in Franciscan convents? Do they notice the idea of sustainability in Le Corbusier's action when he designed cities based on medieval monasteries? Do they identify the classical element of *Cardo* and *Decumanus* in Lúcio Costa's early sketches for the pilot plan of Brasília, the capital of Brazil? What about Lina Bo Bardi's approximation between the popular and the erudite? Looking at the favela (slums), do they see Foucault (2007) or only buildings with rubble? Do they suspect that they can learn from this inhabited space that dismissed the architect's planning?²

Relevant literature shows several intellectual advances that occurred during the last century, among which, some have a direct or indirect impact on the development of the two subjects mentioned above. Maybe the most upsetting issues are related to the History field, which was questioned about its usefulness faced by the classical and western construction of the knowledge area itself. This was determined by three redefinition aspects: the positivist notion on the document's autonomy³; the increasing notion of the historian as a hypothesis creator⁴, and the association of the narrative with other knowledge areas⁵, especially Anthropology, which was the basis for the idea of New History⁶.

The idea that the document is a language that carries intentions and desires in it, and its reading depends on the reader's interpretation will give way to the appropriation of other sources and analysis devices with strong repercussions in the diverse dimensions of city studies⁷. In this regard, History and Aesthetics, as concepts that particularly emphasize the processes of human and social identification with space, for example, will state their complicity⁸. On the other hand, Contemporary Art, with its socially shocking expressions, will be taken as a realm to support the awareness on urban understanding and intervention when, in the 1960s, an ingredient was added to the aesthetically way of thinking the city and critically intervening over it: the empirical knowledge. Differently from the experience of the Renaissance and the erudition of the Illuminist Grand Tour, the practice of the urban space body in New History's context was originally introduced in Guy Debord's ([1958] 2003) Situationist International study and takes the experience as an understanding guide. The drifts (*dérive*), the observation of what cannot be predicted, and the study of the city in its own physical environment, then, come to be considered as methodological processes that aim to (re)discover the place, considering itself as a documentary reference⁹.

The intellectual revolution boosted by Physics and Philosophy regarding the idea of relativity also provided unquestionable support for loosening disciplinary bonds, as the expressive acceptance by architectural production shows. The Theories of Chaos and Quantum and terms as In Between and Displacement will later be elaborated according to Derrida's Deconstruction discourse and justify the shape of buildings from the end of the 1980s, disorganizing stratified ideas about the built world such as architecture's concreteness, which had its essential and permanent structure based in the trilion system. Overcoming the shape defined by the preferences of an epoch, it is possible to see a paradigmatic example of architectural expression in Bilbao's Guggenheim Museum (Figure 1).



Fig. 1: Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, 1997, designed by Frank Gehry. Source: Roseline Oliveira, 2017.

Hidden behind their inclined, crooked and shapeless surfaces, having in mind the difficulty of making ways of thinking more ease¹⁰, this architectural expression pointed to the need to reposition ourselves in the face of dualities (good/bad, beautiful/ugly, form/function, inside/outside, theory/experience) and move from our comfortable positions to try to understand the other. Less ambitiously, to give ourselves the opportunity of having other experiences as a thinking mechanism.

It is evident that these changes based on approximations between disciplines and the impact of the relativity notion, which was briefly highlighted in this article, demonstrate the tendency to evoke a critical stance according to the knowledge and its production method. In this context, empirical knowledge and subjectivity are understood as ways of proceeding, encouraging possibilities for manipulating documentary and perceptual information, and allowing for the invention of other ways of understanding certain aspects, in this case, related to the comprehension and performance in the city.

2 Empirical knowledge and subjectivity: the process of the body as a method

The debate about the study of the city, then, moves away from specific disciplinary content and brings closer issues related to its approaches: how far procedures regarding the study of the city are distant from the 19th-century notion of examples repository? What are the outcomes, in the teaching field, of this opening of anti-binary and pro-occasional possibilities? Is orality used in exercises about the comprehension of the city? Is the image shown by a multimedia projector seen as a document and is it treated based on iconology? In the classroom, is there room for creative interpretation?

Examining activities of universities based in the Northeast of Brazil over the past years, it has been possible to recognize transgressor emergencies on the architect's basic education in terms of teaching and learning methodological practice. These actions follow contemporary advances regarding notions about the city, as they recognize architecture through the body "not only ergometric, but that distinguishes itself, that moves in an unusual way, that has impulses, pleasure, and suffering", opening "great windows for creation" (Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5) (Silva, 2016, p.10, our translation).



Fig. 2: Professor Francisco Xico Costa, from UFPB – Federal University of Paraíba, with students wearing the "Portable 'Muxarabis' for architecture students on the edge of a nervous breakdown, season 2016.2". During the Drawing module, they move from the drawing board and parallel ruler to transform the line into a volumetric, portable product in mask or hood shapes. Considering the experience of their bodies, the students try on their sketches and wear their objects to discuss that drawing has a consequence. Source: Francisco Xico Costa's collection, 2016.



Fig. 3: Architectural Design I discipline, when conducted by Professor Maria Angélica da Silva, with students involved in body language exercises. Drifts and performances are essential mechanisms of this process, which is based on the idea of the city as an enclosure of the human body itself, which, as such, participates in several dynamics that constitute the inhabited space. Source: Silva, 2015, pp. 8-9.



Fig. 4: Images of city studies during a field trip (seasons 2016.1 and 2016.2) in colonial centers of Igarassu and Cabo de Santo Agostinho, Pernambuco, Northeast of Brazil. Source: Roseline Oliveira, 2016.



Fig. 5: Pop-up book, board game, and origami leaflet, examples of products made by students within the Art History, Architecture and City II discipline (2017.1 season), after drifting in urban centers of colonial origin in Pernambuco, Northeast of Brazil. Source: Dandara Melo, 2017.

The idea that “*the body, a mental thing, is the flesh and its surroundings, nature and created stuff, the human voice and the most unimaginable movements*” (Kehl apud Silva, 2015, p. 10, our translation) crosses these initiatives. Among them, the method embraced by *Corpocidade* (“Bodycity”, our translation) stands out (Britto and Jacques, 2010). It is a Meeting that seeks to question the contemporary urban situation as a product of the spectacularization phenomenon that reduces public and citizen participation in the city’s daily life, trying to:

stimulate a debate about how the body, art, ambiance, and city are processed in practices and discourses produced in different fields of knowledge and, particularly, in the visual arts, dance, architecture, and urbanism. It intends to discuss the possible links between body and city as a strategy for redesigning their participatory conditions in the process of shaping public life in which they are co-involved. It intends to establish an arena to debate the ideas and experiment hypotheses collectively, in theoretical and artistic formats¹¹.

Corpocidade is mostly known as an academic event held every two years since 2008, but its project goes beyond. It starts with experiences carried out in the university's routine during disciplinary activities and transforms the results into workshops, publications, and conceptual elaborations¹² (Figure 6).

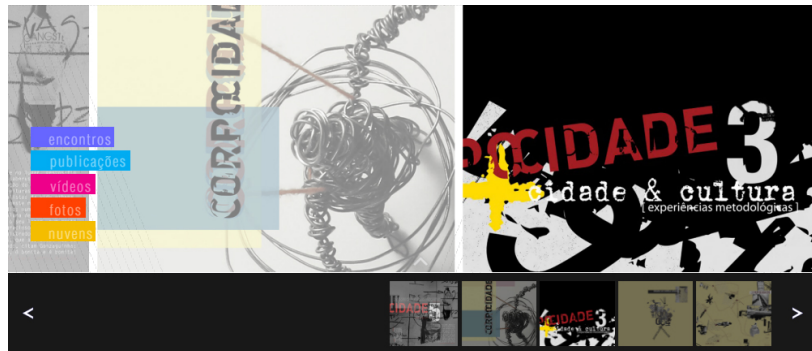


Fig. 6: *Corpocidade's* website homepage. Source: Corpocidade event. Available at <http://www.corpocidade.dan.ufba.br/>. Accessed: 10 December 2017.

In the event's fifth edition, entitled "Urban Gestures" (2016), with exquisite use of the visual identity, the participants were supposed to write their abstract as a manifesto, which was a kind of "pass" to access the discussion topic. The lectures and the thematic sessions were held simultaneously and the one called "Performativities" was shaped over the meeting. Similar to the logic of a game, its rules were set up during the dynamics of the event itself. The "passes" were abandoned, there was no introduction for the participants, nor table or microphone, and no time was set for the presentations. The discussions were based on the members' experiences during an event that was not initially planned in the meeting's program, the traditional "*Festa de Nossa Senhora da Conceição da Praia*" (a Catholic religious festivity) which every year, on December 8, invades the lower part of Salvador, capital of Bahia – Northeast of Brazil.

Connected to the topic "Urban gestures", the results of this experience were the own interpretation processes about individual and collective perceptions of the *Festa*. Then, with minimal guidance and using the materials available at the time, performances happened through the members' bodies (professionals and students of Dance, Theater, Philosophy, Architecture), moving away from the commonly used audiovisual support and conventional spatial arrangements such as classroom, chairs in front and back, screen, and microphone (Figure 7).



Fig. 7: Drawings on the floor and on the participants' bodies as part of the interpretation and performance of the *Festa de Nossa Senhora da Conceição da Praia* on December 8, 2016. Source: *Corpocidade's* website. Available at <http://www.corpocidade.dan.ufba.br/#section-fotos>. Accessed: 14 May 2020.

In a certain way, *Corpocidade* summarizes the path of connecting the 20th-century intellectual revolutions, which took place in several areas of knowledge. It dissolves disciplinary boundaries, causes doubts, stimulates perceptual exchanges, and gives space to multiple possible answers. That was once showed by Lygia Clark¹³ and Hélio Oiticica with their "Animals" and *Parangolés*. "If we watch ourselves, we will see that our own body teaches that everything is united: mind, spirit, flesh" (Silva, 2016, p. 10, our translation).

3 Final considerations: between the city and unpredictability

The academic approaches mentioned in this article take the method as a priority. They understand that, when the movement for the city's pursuit is motivated by the method, it activates the empirical knowledge, which becomes an important mechanism for the development of a critical view before urban and creative events in face of regular references made of paper and stone (Figure 8). Therefore, by allowing the body's involvement in the city (Bogea, 2001), this approach broadens perceptual possibilities in order to benefit the interpretation of dynamics of time, space, and its impacts in the discourse formation.



Fig. 8: Image of Igarassu Village, Northeast of Brazil (Frans Post, 1637), showing the Saints Cosmas and Damian Church (1), the Franciscan convent (2), and with a black rectangle corresponding to a 2017 photo. This detail shows the breadfruit tree, which seems “invisible” even when inserted in the architectural and landscape ensemble recognized as heritage at the federal level since 1972. Source: Landscape Studies Research Group collection – Federal University of Alagoas (UFAL).

These experiences may not provide any procedural result or noticeable impact immediately but, by giving voice to an individualized apprehension of the environment, they can allow the emergence of invisible, asleep, hidden, and, mostly, unquestioned situations¹⁴.

Regarding the first issues raised in this text, when several disciplines are accessed through innovation, they become a rich base of information and, consequently, become favorable to an unusual production of knowledge and establishment of solid practice approaches, as they are taken as a creativity and criticism exercise¹⁵. However, that is more likely to happen if faced as an experience, not as a model or a strict concept, because when something happens again, it becomes different by repetition as it is socially produced and, subsequently, has no rigid concept¹⁶.

To take the process as a method in front of the challenge of studying the city, therefore, requires courage and humbleness. It means assuming that no absolute truth exists and that the ways of understanding things are subjective and relative constructions¹⁷. It is about setting the architect free from the solid modern way of thinking, which has demanded ambition for decades, and making him sensitive to understand and project instead to foresee, because “the dynamics of the environment that surrounds us is much less obvious than we suppose” (Areosa, 2012, p.13 our translation).

Even all the experience and erudition of the architect, urban planner and Professor Lúcio Costa could not prevent the readjustment of his design for the Brasília Bus Terminal, which was planned to work with the atmosphere of early 20th century European cafeterias and became the most popular space of the Government's capital (O Risco..., 2003). Knowledge is a perspective of understanding and it is constantly produced disregarding aspects that are not perceived at a certain moment. For this reason, recognizing the city as a dream and intervention¹⁸, is at the mercy of fate or uncertainty, as the sociologist Zigmunt Bauman (2013), dealing with happiness, and the mathematician Nassim Taleb (2016), with randomness, named (or identified to be known as) the surprising lack of control over life.

Accepting unpredictability when studying the city reinforces the commitment to constantly updating the school. This makes the limits of its framework (curriculum) more flexible and pushes to a reformulation of its practices (methodological). During the educational journey, the evocation of autonomy in knowledge production and the body as a creative instrument is about changing certain standards of the scientific field. As examples, it is possible to mention the possibility of writing in the first person¹⁹, to put the student and teacher position into revision, and to think of the school as a laboratory of experiences, a place for processes and production. The tutor comes closer to the classical performance of the ancient poets as a testimony (Goff, 1990) but also participates as an apprentice by valuing the exchange of collective debate, investing in learning based on subjectivity, and opening up possibilities of looking at the city and producing knowledge.

Almost 300 years ago, Raphael Bluteau (1721) recorded in his dictionary daily life as a basis for learning. Experience and time can turn into maturity but history itself shows that this does not mean guarantees and certainties. If seen subtly, it can only make us less unprepared for all that the city can and will still teach us²⁰.

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1 This article is inspired by the experience of the Landscape Studies Research Group (registered on the CNPq database since 1998), which the author shares the leadership with Professor Maria Angélica da Silva, who I thank for reviewing this text. The Group has been working in an interdisciplinary way (bringing together architects, historians, geographers, archeologists, anthropologists, photographers, designers). It studies the temporalities of urban centers with a colonial origin, cataloging material/immateral landscape references, and taking as central methodological tools the use of primary sources, fieldwork, iconographic analysis through digital manipulation processes, and product elaboration.

2 Paola B. Jacques (2001) explains the idea of fragment, labyrinth, and rhizome as conceptual figures of the slums dynamics based on Deleuze's philosophy.

3 The 1800s Positivism may have been the starting point of questions regarding the History's function because it pointed to discussions in the Social Sciences that referred autonomy to the document and, therefore, put the importance of the historian's work into question. The idea of History, in this context, was that of a model repository of a certain subject that justified identities design, fueled the collectors' desire, and motivated the creation of museums.

4 During the Great World Wars, another posture renewed these debates, focusing them on valuing the past interpretation and the historian's role as a creator of hypotheses and questions, since the notion of the document was also expanded as a language. A milestone of this moment was the work of Fernand Braudel, produced during his time as a prisoner of the Germans, whose narrative essentially addressed the relationship between men and the environment, with the Mediterranean Sea as the protagonist. Bringing closer narrative and Geography, his work represents a movement that became an interdisciplinary one, and then History began to be thought of as an elaborated product and not as contracted data (Braudel, 1983).

5 When History is dissolved in an anthropological stance, an adjective/denomination process begins in this field of knowledge that will cross historiographical publications from the 1970s. Georges Duby and Jacques Le Goff, with their "Histories of Mentalities" (*Histoire des mentalités*), are the French School references which generated disciples focused on culture and nature studies. The so-called New History allows historians to record natural life data interpretations, such as attitudes towards death and childhood, assuming that in every human manifestation lies a way of thinking that goes beyond a context that justifies it. This will allow an enlargement of the observation of the past and the investigation sources themselves and will accept as documents records such as epoch reports, orality, and images, which, for a long time were eliminated from scientific bases and archival sources (these arguments are based on a conference about The Annales History, part of the series organized by professor Vitor Manuel Jorge, and given by Fátima Sá Estevão (ISCTE), which took place on 11.17.2017, at Sacavém Ceramics Museum, Portugal).

6 However, these changes in the way of thinking the world are not all liberating. The long-term past and the quantitative evaluation as structuring aspects of narratives denounce that they still carry traditional procedures for the development of historical thought. "New history in France: the triumph of the Annales" (original title: *L'Histoire en miettes. Des "Annales" à la "nouvelle histoire"*, and Brazilian version "History in crumbs", which is used here) by François Dosse (1994), validated these discursive advances consequences and the contemporary historian challenge to assume plurality, readapt the time notion and to dissolve himself in other narrative approaches, especially when facing the contemporary situation of "information among men

from different continents, makes it necessary to reorient the historian's discourse to adapt to the new historical time awareness" (Dosse, 1994, p.102, our translation).

7 The first modern reference studies in the visual culture field were held by Ervin Panofsky (1979) followed by Carlo Ginzburg (1989), who dealt with the image's instrumental value as historical data that would be associated with the observer's interpretive posture. So, the work of art would be an image to be decoded and seen according to a particular order, shaped by the language of specific cultural patterns. At the same time, it would be the language itself because it represents a look filled with authorial personification. Therefore, going beyond the analysis of the formal aspects and from the observation of details, it is possible to recognize fads, desires, and expectations that characterize a certain time. The image represents the "background principle that reveals the major attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical conception, unconsciously classified by a personality and condensed into a work" (Panofsky, 1979, p. 59, our translation).

8 The work of the historian and ex-mayor of Rome Giulio Carlo Argan (1983) can be recognized as a changing point for the history of the city's study, because unlike Leonardo Benévolo's (1993) argumentative development based on cause and consequence, which for decades headed the bibliographic sources of courses, his approach takes the city as a work of art, explaining it through aesthetic ways and expanding his understanding of the built landscape for the everyday movement: "Urban spaces are also the environments of the private house; the altarpiece of the church, the bedroom or the dining room decoration, even the clothing, and ornaments with which people move, represent the scenic dimension of the city. (...) the woods where you go hunting, the lake or the rivers where you go fishing" (Argan, 2005, p. 3, our translation).

9 "Buildings, constructions, works that have in them the architectural quality of shaping elements that improve the cultural memory" (Ramirez Nieto apud Castriota, 2011, p. 265, our translation).

10 Ethnocentrism has its basis on the western notion of the Logos, which brings as consequence a world view in which a group is taken as the center and, through its values and models, think about other conditions of groups (Derrida, 1973).

11 *Corpocidade* Platform. Available at <http://www.corpocidade.dan.ufba.br/encontro.htm>. Accessed: 10 Dec. 2017.

12 Such as the "Corpography" concept, which is "a type of cartography performed by and in the body, the urban memory recorded in the body, the record of your experience in the city, a kind of urban spelling of the lived city itself, which is inscribed, but also shapes the body of those who experience it" (Jacques, 2008, our translation).

13 "It is how I named my work of this period (...) The positions of the Animals are defined by the arrangement of the metal pieces, which at first glance seem infinite. When I'm asked about how many movements can the Animals do, I say: I don't know, you don't know, but they do" (CLARK, 1980, p. 17, our translation).

14 As classic discourses about Luso-Brazilian urbanism show, which basically vary between regular and irregular, demonstrating "a certain inflexibility in the colonial urban design explanations, disregarding the influence of other elements that can configure the urban mesh, like the port that borders the river; the fort on the other side of the island, or the sugar mill away from the village's urban center. They also leave other definitions out, as the layout of a given location that can characterize a set of paths such as, wide, narrow, long, short, longitudinal, transversal, unfinished, defined by the houses, crossing the churches..." (Oliveira, 2018, p. 32, our translation).

15 As an example, it's possible to mention the recognition of scenographic aspects in Oscar Niemeyer's work and call them baroque without fearing the anachronism, as did Glauco Campello (2001). Also the approximation between Burlingame's gardens representations and the composition of Carmen Miranda's hats (landscaping and carnival) or architecture, Bossa Nova and Pelé (Modernism, music, and football) as did Márcio Campos, professor at UFBA - Federal University of Bahia, in his conference at VI Architecture and Urbanism Week - SEMAU (2010) with the theme "The irresistible risk of the new", organized by the Tutorial Education Program of Architecture and Urbanism Course - Federal University of Alagoas.

16 According to Derrida, when something is readjusted there is always an aspect that gives it uniqueness, can be a way of thinking, handling, functioning. It's like the reading, the discourse, the observation - when you read, you speak and see something again, you read, speak, see differently. The spoken word itself is different, transformed by the phonetic expression, speed, intonation, pronunciation, which, on the other hand, is influenced by a series of situations, of cultural nature or simply occasional, momentary: "Concepts only acquire meaning in the chain of differences, their language and the choice of terms cannot be justified, but

inside a topical and a historical strategy. Therefore, meaning can never be absolute and definitive" (Derrida, 1973, p. 86, our translation).

17 As the poet Manuel de Barros commented in the documentary *Janela da Alma* [*Window of the Soul*] (2001), it isn't the eye that sees it is our way of thinking and feeling that shapes our way of sensing the world.

18 "Cities are both the immediate data of their concreteness, and the untouchable ones of dreams, desires. These imaginary cities are parallel dimensions, evoked by fantasy and yet as real as the cities of stone and lime, as they are the leaven and instrument for transformations, of the search for the best way of living (...)" (Paula, 2006, p. 21, our translation).

19 "It's curious that I ended up making films using the first person because it's not natural for me. I have a very hard time talking about myself. When I sent Santiago's material to Escorel and told him that I had come to the conclusion that the only way to make the film would be using the first person, I added that I was very uncomfortable because it seemed narcissistic. Then he replied, by email, with a quote from [French documentary filmmaker] Chris Marker [1921-2012] which turned out to be important: 'unlike what people say, using the first person in films is a sign of humbleness: all I have to offer is myself'" (Salles, 2018, our translation).

20 Since December 2019, cities around the world have been suffering the consequences of a high dissemination pandemic crisis with the Covid-19, originally from China. "The stance that the different media have registered goes from a forced technological advance to the imminence of chaos, caused by the apparent social unpreparedness to face the epidemic outbreak" (Oliveira and Gudina, 2020, our translation).