

Urba(n)Ear, Approaching, Walking and Listening the City With Notours, Augmented Aurality, in the Project Passeio Branco (White walk) in Lisbon

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Abstract

A research of the walk in the works of Saramago and Stefaan van Biesen in Lisbon: in a theoretical approach, a research emphasizing on representations of the city in a promenadological discovery and in a practical approach, where this urban discovery is concretized in a space of artistic and social transformation. As an urban intervention project it investigates, documents and enhances the aural heritage of the city through participation of residents, materialized in the composition of a soundwalk, building a locative media instrument based on the noTours platform, referring to the *Spaziergangwissenschaft* (the science of walking) implying the community, in a kinetic esthetics, in the planification of their own city through minimal interventions and by going on foot, in this project elaborated as a public artistic laboratory in the space of Lisbon as a reconstruction of the urban space harmonizing its own sensoriality out of literary texts and artistic works.

Keywords: urban sounds, sense of place, sound walk, promenadology, locative media, literature, visual arts, sensoriality, society

“Most people don’t see what’s going on around them. That’s my principal message to writers: for God’s sake, keep your eyes open. Notice what’s going on around you!” (William S. Burroughs)

1. Introduction

In this project we propose a study of walking in the city of Lisbon through a literary, sonic, social and artistic interpretation of the literary works of José Saramago and the artistic oeuvre of Stefaan van Biesen.

The title *Passeio Branco* (*White Walk*) refers to the harmonization of the connected representations of walking in the city based on the novels *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* and *Blindness*. Building on this thoughts, it is the white of blindness that accentuates the sensorial potential of the body during the straying of the blind people in any urban space, as well as an association with the image of the “white” capital Lisbon, the city landscape for the day-to-day walks of Ricardo Reis. The pedestrian dynamics that refines the image of Lisbon through a promenadologic stylistics are presented as an archive of the atmosphere, the history and the presence of the events of the city, not only as a visual mental map of the character Ricardo Reis, but above all, as a sensorial map of the organic reflexes of the body in the urban space.

In this sequence of thoughts, we emphasize on the substitution of the “visual turn” of the city with this “sensorial turn” in a reconstruction of the city of Lisbon, mapping olfactive, haptic, sonic, gustative and kinaesthetic landscapes. This intense phenomenological exploration transforms the walk to a “footnote” in the veined texture of the city, filled with folds where the urban heartbeat reaches the surface, the social microclimate and the historic patina of Lisbon. The general objective of our proposal views the idiosyncratic recuperation of the literary and the artistic image of the city of Lisbon through the kinetics of the walk in the novel *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* and in the artistic vision of the works about this novel by Stefaan van Biesen, and as well the creation of a public and artistic laboratory in the space of Lisbon within our project *Passeio Branco* that concentrates on the reconstruction

of the urban space harmonizing its own sensoriality out of the literary texts of Saramago and the artistic works of Stefaan van Biesen.

2. The science of walking

“Passeio Branco” presents itself as a poetic disorganization of space, a “white blindness”, a suspension of the hegemony of seeing in order to recuperate the residual use of the other senses. On this manner, the project will be a critical confrontation against the excessive politics of seeing, a *promenadography*, a simultaneous writing and reading of the city through the body:

Na realidade, existe uma diferença entre a visão e o tacto: ela separa o primado da visão do primado da sensação, quer dizer, separa a expressão da impressão. A visão é expressiva porque retém do que vê a expressão das coisas. Estabelece uma semiótica que lhe permite reconhecer-se no mundo. Enquanto a sensação do tacto é impressionista porque dá um eco interior à exterioridade. O tocar torna táctil o que escapa à visão. O tacto introduz-nos numa sensorialidade eufórica, em lugares cegos e fechados, onde se produzem prazeres a três dimensões.¹ (Andrieu, 2004:69)

This exploration of space, through walking as a sensorial kinesthetic experience connects itself with a recent scientific and esthetic vision, *Spaziergangwissenschaft* (Promenadology), introduced in the eighties by the sociologist, urbanist and art historian Lucius Burckhardt (1925-2003). But, before we go into detail on this new tendency of walking, crystalizing itself as a science, we synthesize a short history of walking as an artistic and philosophical tool.

1. “Actually there is a difference between seeing and touching, it separates the priority of seeing of the priority of feeling, this means, it separates the expression of the impression. Seeing is expressive because it depots of the expression of things. It establishes a semiotics that allows you to identify yourself in the world. While the sensation of the touch is impressionistic because it gives an interior echo to the exterior, the touch transforms into tactile what escapes to the vision. The touch introduces us to a euphoric sensoriality, in blind and closed spots, where pleasures produce themselves in three dimensions.” (in Portuguese).

Walking as an aesthetic practice goes as far back as the end of the 18th century. Bases were laid by thinkers and writers as Wordsworth and Jean Jacques Rousseau whose daily walks resulted in the *Rêveries of a Solitary Walker*. But also Charles Darwin created a circular “sand walk” path around his house so he could think without interruption. Some illustrious examples of poets being renowned as passionate walkers who integrated their walking practices in their works were Wordsworth, Machado, Whitman and Kerouac. Methods such as ‘wandering’ are found already in Edgar Allan Poe’s *Man of the Crowd* (1840) and walking as an instrument for knowledge as reflected in psychogeography goes back as far as mid 19th century Paris and to Charles Baudelaire’s 1863 essay *The painter of Modern Life* where he describes the *flâneur*, a person who walks the city to experience it. The first major written work by a *flâneur* practitioner was the unfinished *Arcades* project by Walter Benjamin, documenting his walks in the former arcades of Paris. The concept of a passive urban walker was transformed by André Breton in 1920 into walking as a positive tool to challenge perceptions of the city. In the 1950ies psychogeography arises as one of a set of ideas and practices developed by the *Internationale Lettristes* (who later gave birth to the Situationists), a study of how places affect the psychological states of those who pass through them. With a reciprocal meaning: that the places might be changed in order to change the experiences and mental states of their residents and visitors.

Psychogeography was defined in 1955 by Guy Debord in *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography* in 1955 and producing the “Theory of the Dérive” in 1958, a document which essentially serves as an instruction manual for the psychogeographic procedure, executed through the act of *dérive* (“drift”).

In the late 1960ies this was followed by first encounters between art and walking. Richard Long with “A Line Made by Walking (1967)”, then 22 years old and a student at Saint Martin’s School of Art in London, walked back and forth along a straight line in the grass in the English countryside, leaving a track that he then photographed in black and white.

Another milestone work is the video made by Bruce Nauman “Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square” (1969), a work intriguing by its simplicity, only composed with time, space and the body.

Walking as an instrument for art culminated in the work of Marina Abramovic “The Lovers, Great Wall of China” (1988), an epic voyage on foot of 5.500 km undertaken with her colleague Ulay, as last of the many performances they realized together. Each of them, beginning at the opposite end of the wall walking towards each other, until they met and reunited, with as a final goal to say goodbye to each other. A gesture overcomes pain and endurance.

Other major contemporary artists as Hamish Fulton, Francis Alÿs, Janet Cardiff, Gabriel Orozco and as well interdisciplinary collectives as Stalker (Italy) with ON/Osservatorio No-made made a bridge from the late 1960ies to the 21st century and influenced the contemporary art scene intensely with walking as a tool for art practice.

Recent art exhibitions show how art walking keeps captivating the public, for example Richard Long's "Heaven and Earth" at Tate Britain (2009), Francis Alÿs "Story of Deception" at Tate Modern (2010), Hamish Fulton "Walk" at Turner Contemporary Margate (2012) and "Walk On. 40 Years of Art Walking" in Sunderland (2013).

Artist's walks are shaped in different forms. Some artists trace their daily movements, with or without GPS devices. Others record or photograph their walks, make paths or lose themselves deliberately, let them guide by wind capturing devices or stumble in the dark and capture, transform and translate their walks into art objects or experiences.

The Belgian artist-writer-walker Stefaan van Biesen joins himself with this select group of international walking artists, connecting explicitly with the visions of the Swiss sociologist and urbanist, Lucius Burckhardt [1925-2003] who introduced the 'Spaziergangwissenschaft', the 'science of walking', expanding it to a subjective thought exercise in the urban texture and the landscape, resulting in the recent projects 'Sensitive islands' and 'Libraries of Walks' (2010-2013), interacting with literary works of José Saramago and Fernando Pessoa and leading to this newest walking project "Passeio Branco" in Lisbon (2015-2017) based on *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*.

Introduced as a discipline on the academic curriculum at the University of Kassel (as well organizing city of the important Art Biennale *Documenta*), Spaziergangwissenschaft or the science of walking in the urban landscape implies the community, in a kinetic esthetics, in the planification of their own city through minimal interventions and by going on foot, which can change the perception in relation to the space.

After the introduction of promenadology at the University of Kassel in the eighties it stayed on the curriculum till 1997 and was continued by his students Martin Schmitz and by Bertram Weisshaar in the University of Leipzig in 2006-2007. In 2007 Klaus Schaefer created at the Bremen University the seminar "On foot" as a topic of scientific research where the urban landscape becomes a mental construction through the intentional consciousness-raising of the senses of the body. On this moment the promenadology is an artistic object in various international projects realized within the fabric of society, like by Atelier Latent in Leipzig, coordinated by Bertram Weisshaar. The discipline knew a parallel development in France via the urban walks created by Yves Clerget.

In Portugal the original term *Spaziergangwissenschaft* was translated and introduced into the lexicon of the Portuguese language by the sociologist José Machado Pais in his book *Nos Rastos da Solidão* (On the trails of loneliness) in 2006: the promenadology becomes an instrument for social observation of the city. To caption the urban reality in sensory meanings, emphasizing the feeling, refers to a multimodal body in a physical implication in the city space of Lisbon. On this way, the cognitive dimension of the urban space articulates itself in a personalized urban layer, by means of a somatic choreography:

O corpo motor é, assim, um corpo cartografante: os lugares por onde passa organizam-se como um mapa. E o mapa, ao revelar o corpo através dos lugares por onde passou, emerge como uma metáfora do conhecimento (da relação entre o corpo e o lugar).² (Silva, 1999: 27)

Stefaan van Biesen is one of the important artists, on an international level, who investigates promenadology on an aesthetical way (by means of plastic work, multimedia, installations and performances, contextualized in social projects). His artistic oeuvre has an affinity with the work of another famous walker, Fernando Pessoa. The plastic corpus of Stefaan van Biesen is an important artistic comment on a Pessoa-logical vision. We integrate for example his oeuvre in a critical analysis of the literary representation of the city of Lisbon, which leads to this joint project with the artist, *Passeio Branco*, and artistic and literary research of Lisbon by means of the phenomenology of the walk: “If the image is text, then the body is space. If texts can create images, then spaces can change bodies and vice versa”. (Hallensleben, 2010:93).

The literary reading of the kinetics of the body in the city, in this case by means of an urban research of the oeuvre of the Portuguese writers José Saramago and Fernando Pessoa related to the plastic dimension of the oeuvre of Stefaan van Biesen, doesn't mean a rift with the daily perception, but follows the emancipatory and intimate logic of a new association between the epidermis of the urban space and its sensory somatic potential. On this way, *derive* through the city presents a broadened consciousness-raising of the senses. A cross-pollination that magnifies the phenomenological scheme of the city:

2. “The body as a motor is, in this way, a map-making body: the places where it passes through, there it organizes itself as a map. And the map, revealing the body through the places where it passed, appears as a metaphor of knowledge (of the relation between body and place).” (in Portuguese).

La relation de l'homme qui marche à sa cité, à ses rues, à ses quartiers, qu'il les connaisse déjà ou les découvre au fil de ses pas, est d'abord une relation affective et une expérience corporelle. Un fond sonore et visuel accompagne sa déambulation, sa peau enregistre les fluctuations de la température et réagit au contact des objets ou de l'espace. Il traverse des nappes d'odeurs pénibles ou heureuses. Cette trame sensorielle donne au cheminement au fil des rues une tonalité plaisante ou désagréable selon les circonstances. L'expérience de la marche urbaine sollicite le corps en son entier, elle est une mise en jeu constante du sens et des sens. (Breton, 2000 : 121)

3. Summarizing description of the Project Passeio Branco

With this conceptual background we propose two currents of the research of the walk in the works of Saramago and Stefaan van Biesen: a theoretical current, a research that emphasizes the representations of the city of Lisbon in a promenadological discovery and in a practical current, where this urban discovery is concretized in a space of artistic and social transformation in this project.

Investigating the novel *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* by José Saramago with this promenadologic experience as point of departure as manifested in a social and artistic project and coupling the theoretical paradigm dedicated to walking and the literary perspective of the sensationalism in the works of Fernando Pessoa in the construction of the urban image of Lisbon, on this way we consider our proposal as a new approach that can open various hypotheses in the promenadologic interpretation, retrieved from literary texts.

The matrix of our analytical trajectory, departing from the novel *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* and the drawings of Stefaan van Biesen inspired by it, is a new semiotics of the city of Lisbon constructed through a poetic kinetics of the body, an authentic phenomenological opportunity of manifolding unprecedented literary and visual representations. In this sense, an analysis of the promenadological topic overlapping the visions of Saramago and Stefaan van Biesen takes into account the direct sensorial experience between the body and the city, and indirectly through synesthetical correspondences.

On this way the walk becomes “an instrument” of the body to awake an alert consciousness in relation to the urban space, but as well in relation to the own destiny:

It is not well like this, when I decided to travel to Lisbon it seemed like I had reasons that I couldn't escape of, important matters to handle with overthere, And now, Now, the phrase suspended, stayed the looking into the mirror in front of you, Now I see myself as the elephant that feels approaching to the hour of death and that starts walking to the place where it leads to his death³[...] (Saramago, 1995:81).

The kinetics of the surprised body in daily walks adjusts and widens the perception in relation to the own urban environment, eliminating the prefabricated representations in favour of a mental urban image constructed through the complete sensoriality of the body. The objective will be, on this way, to reconstitute the body to the city as a place of sketching yourself in the daily existence, mapping morphological and emotional realities in the sphere of the daily life. In the vision of the architect José Joaquim Bação, Saramago

prefere o íntimo ao público, o fechado à praça, a casa mais que a paisagem. Não é o enigmático, nem o extravagante que lhe chama a atenção, mas a vida quotidiana, o senso comum, a arquitectura dos dias precedentes não as dos acontecimentos, aquela que é concebida para a natureza viva, para que haja alguém nela. Não se deixa seduzir pelo extraordinário, pelas ficções poéticas que dizem exalar algumas arquitecturas.⁴ (Bação,2004:39)

Thus, our general objective will be to retrieve the senses of the corporality implicated in a specific Lisbonian urban space, interface between the real physical space and the fictional space of Saramago and the artistic space in the vision of Stefaan van Biesen.

3. “Não é bem assim, quando resolvi embarcar para Lisboa parecia-me que tinha razões a que não podia fugir, questões importantíssimas a tratar cá, E agora, Agora, suspendeu a frase, ficou a olhar o espelho na sua frente, Agora vejo-me como o elefante que sente aproximar-se a hora de morrer e começa a caminhar para o lugar aonde tem de levar a sua morte [...]”. (in Portuguese).

4. “[...] prefers the intimate above the public, the closed environment above the square, the house more than the landscape. It is not the enigmatic, nor the extravagancy that draws his attention, but everyday life, the common sense, the architecture of the days of the past, not to ones of now, that what is conceived by the living nature, because there is somebody present in it. He doesn't let himself seduce by the extraordinary, by poetic fictions that are to be said to express some architectures.” (in Portuguese).

On this way the analysis of the sensorial amplified dimension proportioned by the walk in the city implies an interdisciplinary approach to the literary text and the visual arts. Our hermeneutic act implies various epistemological crossings between cognitive sciences, psychology, cultural history, anthropology, phenomenology, new technologies, cultural geography, the theory of architecture, history and philosophy of arts.

4. noTours, augmented aurality

The sensorial experience of the city, between the space of the freedom of the body and the coercive space, between the auditive and the haptic, will be an impulse for a new type of nomadism or a new urban ontology. On this way the incarnation of the city receives an answer in a three-dimensional perception of space, from the depth of the contours and from the sensory protuberances of the urban morphology:

Ce bruit se redresse aussi en information à travers la boîte joliment compliquée de l'oreille externe et interne, mais souvent nous bâtissons des boîtes tout aussi raffinées autour de nos corps : murailles, cilles, maisons, cellules monastiques. A travers portes et fenêtres, la monade perçoit doucement.(Serres, 1985:90)

The voice of the city, as a literary and sonic manifestation reinvents itself as *graphein* of the body, a promenadographic space, including an interactive scheme, people and technological systems in a reconstructed aesthetic urban environment. At the same time, with and parallel to art walking, the phenomenon of sound walking saw the light and developed itself since the late 1960ies. In 1966, the magazine ArtForum publishes Tony Smith's experiences consisting in driving on the surroundings of New Jersey, "converting an attitude in form", In the same year, Max Neuhaus paints audience's hands with the message "Listen" before all them went to a series of defined listening localizations. The mereaction of listening becomes a creative act, inheritor of the pan aurality and subversiveness. The sound walk is manifested as an improvisation with the sounds of a territory and the listening act merges to the idea of "walking as an aesthetic practice" completing the analysis that Francesco Careri makes about

what he called of nomadic cities, concept that also interested the lettrist movement, land-art and new architectonic practices during those years.

Proposals like the Otodate itineraries (oto-sound/date- place) by the artist Akio Suzuki in Berlin, Paris or Torino; sound-walks by Hildegard Westerkamp or Andra McCartney, close to the ecologist premise of the World Sound Scape Project; the proposed walks in City in a Soundwalk by Michelle Nagai using the Extreme Slow Soundwalk derived from the Deep Listening by Pauline Oliveros; the performances by Viv Corringham; the work Blind City by Francisco López, where blind people guide others with blindfolded eyes; the works by Jean-Paul Thibaud and Nicolas Tixier (Parcours commentés and Qualified listening motion) in the CRESSON lab in Grenoble; or the soundwalks by Janet Cardiff have elaborated a set of interesting antecedents in the interference between sonic spheres, many times with high creative overlapping. These are just some examples that can approximate us to a psychogeographic city that is since now manifested as a discontinuous and subjective space.

But also, to all this classical projects, we have to add the works by *Escoitar.org*, *Tactical Sound Garden*, *Always something somewhere else*, *Sonic City...* who, using technological tools, have introduced the figure of the data-flaneur, putting the ear, if not in a higher level than the vision, at least in the same importance than the eye, extending the experience of the perception of the city, understood as a reality that multiplies itself in each listening act and that incessantly builds our reality.

Passeio Branco is building on these recent developments and allying itself with noTours, a project that allows touring a place while living an augmented acoustic experience connected with the actual space visited and the rhizomatic situation of the territory involved. This project uses mobile devices based on open source code as well as GPS technologies (which provides the position of users) and 3D audio contents (binaural and ambisonics).

Using the extended format of touristic audio guides, understanding them as devices giving us information about spaces cataloged as relevant or for the public interest, this project would like to question their real value as well as the official discourses that contain. Objective of noTours is the deconstruction of this old-framed format for designing a new one opened to the collective memory of the inhabitants and connecting it to the real time situation of the city involved. It can be considered as an intervention in the perception of the urban space, understood as a stream of complex actions, as a performance and as an act of collective memory. Between fiction and reality, our focus is the intervention on those strange or familiar territories and converting them into mutant spaces. Touring them under the effects sound will reveal us a hidden city filled of personal stories and interferences. This

project Passeio Branco presupposes as well a textual experience of the city (fragments of text of Saramago and Pessoa).

Next to the artistic and literary exploration of the city, noTours and Passeio Branco are urban intervention projects to investigate, document and enhance the aural heritage of the city through participation of residents. For this reason workshops with young people, students and residents are part of the collaborative processes, that aim to research urban narratives in the city.

A series of workshops start with an invitation to create geolocated narratives based on different memories and experiences of their living environment. By creating this narratives the participants are encouraged to explore a creative use of mobile devices and to explore the possibilities of locative media as a narrative tool.

Young people and older people work together, the latter sharing their knowledge of oral tradition and their living memory of the history of the place and the young ones would contribute with their knowledge of technology, creating an environment where everybody is learning and teaching at the same time.

The workshops proposes a theoretical and practical approach to the aural phenomena and the sonorous identity of the city. First from a theoretical point of view, studying the experience of listening and complexities of sound. Later, the workshops focus on the practical configuration of a digital sonic cartography of a defined territory, materialized in the composition of soundwalks based on GPS localization: building a locative media instrument based on the noTours platform.

Maps are used as a metaphor of the links between sound and place. Through creating a collaborative sound map we introduce a reflexive exercise about his relationship with the environmental sounds. Geolocating a sound on the map is not complex, but it involves a thoughtful process as fill out a form including details of the physical location but, mainly, writing down your psychological and emotional “coordinates” (description of soundscapes, relevance, personal reasons, affection, etc.)

Our objective regarding the workshop is double. First we would like to introduce the participants into the cultural aspects of sounds and the complexity of the act of listening in a defined place. Also, we would like to create a team that could help in the construction and development of the final sound walk.

This dimension of the project turns the process that allows some social expressions to be considered cultural heritage upside down, by offering society a tool to participate in the process and actualizing the sonic identity of the city.

We propose working with all age groups from children, students to older residents and local artists in order to find enough physical and mental connections to the local universe of sounds and activities of the place.

Finally, this social and creative intervention closes the hermeneutic circle of the city, opened by literature and visual arts.

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