A STUDY OF EXPERIENTIAL ARCHEOLOGY OF A POEM BY FERNANDO PESSOA

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Motto

Sou feito das ruínas do inacabado e é uma paisagem

de desistências que definiria meu ser.[1]

Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935)

In the last decades, archaeology has extended its operability to phenomenological experience, crystallizing even a sub-discipline, that of experiential archaeology (Gheorghiu 2011; 2018). The experiential archaeology project presented here was carried out in three cities in Portugal, Mação, Tomar and Lisbon and analyses, from a poetic perspective, the effects of Time on Matter. This type of archaeology can be done in different ways that capture human experience; the one I use for this project is photography. Through photography I try to capture the emotion produced by an unusual aspect of the action of Time, either while walking on a street, or while reading a poem.

My tool for analysing the world around me is Psychogeography (see Coverley 2010), a type of exploratory study of emotion triggered during a walk. Guy Debord defines psychogeography as a study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals (Debord, 1955, p. 23). I used psychogeography as a method of exploring the urban landscape and to experience a poem by the great Portuguese modernist writer and poet Fernando Pessoa, in the same way an observer experiences a cityscape. I consider psychogeography to be an instrument of experiential archaeology, one that I use to explore the city. Of all the aspects of the city, the ruins fascinate me with their tragedy and

the obvious expression of the passage of Time. In this respect, Vol. 1 of Design | Arts | Culture published in January 2021 was a revelation for me, as it presented the fascination of ruins in countless interpretive perspectives. I believe that the psychogeographic experience can take place not only after experiencing reality, but also as a mental experience of immersion in the work of art, for example in a poem. Thus, the archaeological site becomes a virtual one, immaterial and mental, in which we can immerse ourselves to experience it as we experience an urban structure.

In front of the force of Nature that transforms matter as if trying to continue the human creation, during psychogeographic pilgrimages I am sometimes carried away by imagination interpreting the details captured in photographs as discreet or obvious signs on the walls of ruins that invite me to listen to the stories of their past. The artistic imagination is to be found in the scientific one, such as the archaeological imagination (Shanks, 2012; Gheorghiu, 2020), and psychogeography is located on the border between these two perspectives of knowledge. Psychogeographic experiences have allowed me to express in a creative manner, the way in which the ruins proudly tell their fascinating stories. Sometimes we experience reality not only by appealing to our imagination but even more, by immersing ourselves in the subconscious of dreaming. Not infrequently, I entered

in a state of dream, and this break from reality boosted the creative process.

I imagined the city as an archaeological site, so I used visual metaphors made by condensing personal photographs, to present an experiential archaeological research of imaginary ruins, inspired by verses of Fernando Pessoa from the poem No lugar dos palácios desertos e em ruínas / In place of deserted and ruined Palaces (see arquivopessoa.net). The poem was published under the name Álvaro de Campos (one of the various heteronyms of the poet Fernando Pessoa). In reflection to his rebellious and aggressive temperament, Pessoa's poems reproduce revolt and nonconformity, manifested by a true poetic revolution. [2] Thus, I step into the realm of the imagination reading these verses.

Here is my interpretation and translation of the poem:

> In place of deserted and ruined palaces
>
> By the sea,
> Let's read, smiling, the secrets of the fates
> Who knows how to love
> Whatever it is, the fate of those
> That love took
> For the shadow, or in the light they made their shadow,
> Whatever the flight.Certainly, they were
> more real and happier. [3]

Sometimes, this archaeological journey conducted by means of experience can transfer a person from reality to a dream state; this is the case with this psychogeographical study, where poetry was like a trigger for emotions and imagination guided me through Pessoa's text to be able to construct a visual message of his lyrics. Looking for the most appropriate way to visually express the emotion of discovery generated by these verses, I condensed images of the ruins of the cities that I related to the key words of the poem, at the same time bearing in mind the experience of Jorge Luis Borges' famous and fascinating essay The Circular Ruins (1962). Both Pessoa's poem and Borges' essay captivated me so much that they determined me to psychogeographically explore the boundary between imagination and reality, both presenting imaginary sites that become subjects of experiential archaeology the

moment you begin to go through them mentally.

Inspired by Borges' essay in which dream, and reality intertwine until the transition between the two dissolves taking the form of a circular journey, I extracted this idea of circularity for the creation of visual narratives. Photographs of ruins that show traces of degradation caused by the passage of time are presented in the form of four condensed visual narratives that visualise four different versions of the poem's verses. Thus, I did not stop at a single image to illustrate the poem, but I let the imagination build new representations like a fractal that opens new perspectives while preserving the initial matrix. Thus, keeping the essence of the lyrics, I generated four different perspectives of the poem. These four perspectives are developed accordingly with four distinct visual narratives that present stories about ruins; however, the visualizations of the same verses aim to appear as if dividing, but also telling a single story at the same time.

The images I composed (Figure 1-4) are based on the concept of 'saudade', a type of melancholy which is specific to the Portuguese culture. In my opinion, Fernando Pessoa managed to best express the concept of saudade; not infrequently I found in his poems this melancholy specific to the Portuguese people. With this in mind, I studied the action of light on the shapes, colours and textures of various architectural elements and watched how their volume was highlighted by the play of light and shadows. Sometimes I noticed a calm melancholy in that transition. Fascinated by the spectacular play of light and shadows that accentuates textures and shapes under the Portuguese sun, I imagined the lyrics of the poem as a personal lived experience in Mação, Tomar and Lisbon, so I built waves in the shape of a cactus, the sky in the texture and colours of the ancient walls, the shadows of living beings that suggest the idea of love, balance, but also of illusion, like the shadows of Plato's cave, or the steps of the ancient palace on which light slides to the water carrying the secrets of the ancient walls. The colours in the images created are representative of Portugal: blue is found everywhere in the beautiful Azulejos4 or decorating the walls of houses like a belt, and the ochre-yellow and terracotta colour frame the windows and roofs of buildings. These

colours of the sky and the earth, as well as the textures of the walls in my visual narratives, are a leitmotif of my research into experiential archaeology in Portugal. Following my sensations and emotions caused by the experience of the world around me, I allowed my dream to direct my imagination and thus to cross the fine line between the real and the imaginary world.

This experience, which I consider transformative, opened new horizons, giving me another vision of the world. The game of creating a virtual world parallel to the real one fascinated me from the beginning of my experience as a photographer, and ever since I have tried to emphasize it in all my experiments. All the archaeological-experiential discoveries, all these emotions captured with the help of photography, were condensed in a visual poem located between two worlds: the real one and the imaginary one.

Figure 1. The lost path to blue

Figure 2. The secrets of the waves

Figure 3. Their shadow warms the sunlight

Figure 4. The walls and the whispers of the sea

Figure 1-4. Digital collage with ruins of the Portuguese City.
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Series of visual narratives representing four perspectives of
Fernando Pessoa's poem
In place of deserted and ruined Palaces.
Photos taken in Mação, Tomar and Lisbon, Portugal 2019.

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NOTES

[1] Quote by Fernando Pessoa: "I am made from the ruins of the unfinished, and it is a landscape of renunciation that would define my being."
    Translation by Author. Original quote available at: https://mensagem.online/182569-sou_feito_das_ruinas_do_inacabado_e_e
    (25.07.2021)
[2] Dilva Frazão, no date. Álvaro de Campos. Heterônimo do poeta Fernando Pessoa.
    Available at: https://www.ebiografia.com/alvaro_de_campos/ (25.07.2021)
[3] Poetry by Álvaro de Campos. Fernando Pessoa. Lisbon: Ática, 1944 (imp. 1993). - 19.
    Attribution to Campos rejected: Álvaro de Campos - Book of Verses .
Fernando Pessoa. (Critical Edition. Introduction, transcription, organization and notes by Teresa Rita Lopes.) Lisbon: Estampa, 1993. Translation
    by Author. Available at: http://arquivopessoa.net/textos/4350 (20.07.2021)
[4] Azulejos. The story behind Lisbon's beauty. Available at:
    https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20140515-the-story-behind-lisbons-beauty (20.07.2021)

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