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Drawing the City

A Proposal for an Ethnographic Study in Rio de Janeiro

Karina Kuschnir

Abstract

Drawing the city is a proposal for an ethnographic research project in Rio de Janeiro. I begin by mapping the production of an international group calling themselves ‘urban sketchers,’ whose collective project extols drawing as a form of looking, knowing and registering the experience of living in cities. Next I show the connections between art and anthropology, as well as their relation to cities and to Rio de Janeiro in particular. The sources and bibliography on the themes of the social history of art, drawing, visual anthropology and urban anthropology are also discussed. Setting out from the latter area, I present the possibilities for undertaking an ethnography that contributes to our comprehension of the graphic and symbolic narratives of urban life.

Keywords: drawing, art, city, urban anthropology, Rio de Janeiro

Resumo

Desenhando a cidade é uma proposta de estudo etnográfico no Rio de Janeiro. Começo mapeando a produção de um grupo internacional que se autodenomina “desenhadores urbanos” (urban sketchers), cujo projeto valoriza o desenho como uma forma de olhar, conhecer e registrar a experiência de viver em cidades. Em seguida, mostro as aproximações entre arte e antropologia, bem como sua relação com as cidades e o Rio de Janeiro em particular. As fontes e as referências bibliográficas são discutidas em torno das temáticas da história social da arte, do desenho, da antropologia visual e da antropologia urbana. A partir desta última, apresento as possibilidades de realizar uma etnografia que contribua para a compreensão das narrativas gráficas e simbólicas da vida urbana.

Palavras-chave: desenho, arte, cidade, antropologia urbana, Rio de Janeiro

Drawing the City

A Proposal for an Ethnographic Study in Rio de Janeiro
www.desenhandoacidade.wordpress.com¹

Karina Kuschnir

“Drawing to see” | Why draw?



The title of this section is taken from Joaquim Pais de Brito’s catalogue for the exhibition “Drawing to see: the encounter of Bárbara Assis Pacheco with the galleries of Amazonia,” organized by the National Museum of Ethnology in Lisbon in 2009. Brito’s exuberant work as the museum’s director has taught us, as anthropologists and spectators, that objects are always “open to new fields of signification,” since “they exist before the eyes that look at them” and “each look has its own history, made from a mixture of intellectual construction, experience, sensibility and daydreaming in which it seeks out its own limits.” It is the anthropologist who alerts us to the wealth of experimenting, interrogating and searching for knowledge through multiple languages, and thus allows us to attain new “levels of reading and understanding,” since “there is no such thing as exclusive knowledge that allows the formulation of the infinity of questions and responses that objects carry within them.” The title of the exhibition invites us to plunge into one of these multiple languages, produced in the artist-object encounter: “drawing to see,” which we could also read as drawing to know, comprehend, appropriate, narrate and produce.²



In November 2007, Gabriel (Gabi) Campanario, a Spaniard now living and working in the USA as an illustrator and journalist for The Seattle Times, posted a set of drawings on Flickr

1 All the images illustrating this text can be seen at www.desenhandoacidade.wordpress.com. The use of small inserted images is inspired by the cover of Gregory 2008 and merely serves to remind the reader to consult the original online. I would like to thank Juva Batella (without his support, I would not have gone to USK-Lisbon; and for the revision of the original texts in Portuguese), Gilberto Velho (for the encouragement and for the suggestions for this version), Andréa Barros, Arbel Griner and Vera Herrmann (for their readings and lively comments) and Daphne Kuschnir (for essential images at the last moment).

2 All the quotations in this paragraph are from Brito 2009, pages 4 and 5. On the origin and plurality of meanings of the word “desenhar” [draw], see Gomes 1996.

entitled “urban sketches.” A year later, the initiative led to a blog and, in December 2009, gave rise to the non-profit organization Urban Sketchers (USK) which is dedicated to organizing events, raising funds and providing grants to artists. Since then, as well as recruiting members in more than 50 countries, USK has also generated around 25 local affiliated blogs, like USK-Portugal, USK-Indonesia, USK-Argentina and so on. The first international symposium hosted by the NGO took place in 2010, in Portland, USA. A second event was held the following year in Lisbon, Portugal, attended by around 250 “urban sketchers,” including researchers, professors, students and speakers.³ The “spirit” of USK is summarized in its manifesto:

We draw on location, indoors or out, capturing what we see from direct observation. Our drawings tell the story of our surroundings, the places we live and where we travel. Our drawings are a record of time and place. We are truthful to the scenes we witness. We use any kind of media and cherish our individual styles. We support each other and draw together. We share our drawings online. We show the world, one drawing at a time.⁴

The final phrase of the manifesto became a slogan for the group. Displayed prominently on all its blogs, the phrase “We show the world, one drawing at a time” “calls attention to an interesting contemporary phenomenon: *knowing the world through drawings*.”

The expression “show the world” “not only means “showing the world” “but also exploring and knowing this world, as the many synonyms of the verb “to show” “make clear: “present, reveal, manifest, expose, mark, prove, highlight, attest, emphasize, allow to see, make understand, demonstrate, make visible.”⁵



Teresa Carneiro explores these dimensions, presenting the drawings from the book *Diários gráficos em Almada* – which involves the participation of various members of the Portugal and Spain USK – as experiences that express a “more attentive look,” “a “systematic investigation,” “an “attitude of interrogating and rediscovering the mediations

3 Detailed information on USK, its history and events, can be found at www.urbansketchers.org. I should immediately point out that in the text I make recurrent use of some terms typical to the universe of blogs clearly familiar to readers: online, post, link, site, blogger, etc.

4 Available at <http://www.urbansketchers.org/p/about-usk.html>.

5 Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (software), Cambridge University Press, v. 1, 2003.

and ways of seeing the world” in order to, eventually, “(re)encounter the world through drawing.”⁶

“We are not perfect sketchers” | Who draws?



“Lisboa”, Eduardo Salavisa 2011

The sub-title for this section comes from the title of Eduardo Salavisa’s article in the above-cited book, which was published to accompany an exhibition of drawings of Almada, a city in Portugal. As Salavisa explains, the idea that someone can make drawings without calling him or herself an “artist”“(or a professional illustrator) is central to this universe:

The authors of the displayed sketchbooks have no intention of being artists. While some are, and some will be, this was not why they took part in this exhibition. The fact they are all excellent sketchers, which they are, is likewise not the reason why they are here. They took part because they have a habit: they draw in sketchbooks systematically, daily, I would even say obsessively.

6 This and later citations from Teresa Carneiro are taken from her text “Desenhar o olhar sobre o mundo” [Drawing the gaze onto the world], published in Salavisa (2011).



Among the universe of people who contribute to USK, one particular sketcher and blogger stands out: Danny Gregory, who is a New Yorker and the author of at least three books central to the sketchbook world and its online interface.⁷ It all began in 2003 with the publication of *Everyday Matters: a memoir*, an autobiography composed of texts and drawings, defined on its back cover as a “graphic memoir.”⁸ In this book, Gregory tells how an accident left his wife Patty paraplegic, and how the couple tried to carry on with their lives, raising their son Jack, who was just a ten-month old baby at the time of the accident. The story’s meaning is also summarized on the back cover:

In a world where nothing seemed to have much meaning, Danny decided to teach himself to draw, and what he learned stunned him. Suddenly things had color again, and value. The result is *Everyday Matters*, his journal of discovery, recovery, and daily life in New York City. It is as funny, insightful, and surprising as life itself.



“Amsterdam”, Danny Gregory 2010

On page 12 of the book Gregory narrates with an air of suspense: “Then one evening I decided to teach myself to draw.” The pause (“one evening”),

7 His three main books are cited in the bibliography. Gregory was also the creator and moderator of an online discussion group that was founded in 2004, which now has more than 4,000 members and is hosted on the Yahoo Groups site (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/everydaymatters/>). Since 2010, his blog has become more like a website and can be found at www.dannygregory.com. As well as these web addresses, there are various others related to Gregory, with groups on Flickr, Facebook etc.

8 A reference to the concept of a “graphic novel” – an established term for books of sequential art with denser themes aimed at adults that do not fit into the category of “comics.” About these terms, see chapter 7 of *Comics and Sequential Art* by Will Eisner (1985; translated into Portuguese as *Quadrinhos e a arte sequencial*, 1999).

the unusual (“teach myself”) and the magical ability (“draw”) combine all the ingredients for a ritual of transformation in which the hero overcomes obstacles and discovers a new world. In his own words: “it didn’t matter what I drew.” All that mattered was drawing with that “slow, careful gaze,” through which he learned to value each day (“everyday matters”) and each object, however simple. Opened cans of food, old pairs of shoes, a corner of New York – *everything* can encounter its own space in his sketchbooks.⁹

Saul Steinberg, cited by Gregory as one of his main sources of inspiration, talks about drawing as a process of knowing: “You must manage to establish complicity with whatever you’re drawing until you gain a deep knowledge of it.” The observational drawing, the artist says, forces the sketcher “to find answers to questions that so far haven’t been raised.”¹⁰

A number of these elements appear in *The Creative License* – Gregory’s most extensive book. The explicit objective of the work is to cultivate “a wild celebration of amateurism” (back cover) and turn drawing into a process, a means of self-discovery and self-recuperation, as the title and subtitle emphasize: “*The Creative License: giving yourself permission to be the artist you truly are.*” The punning on the words *license* and *permission* suggests that learning to draw can be like learning to drive, accessible to everyone. This is the same principle found implicitly in the USK manifesto (which does not use the word “artist”) and explicitly in Salavisa’s text, cited above. Not by coincidence, the epilogue to Gregory’s book reads: “Dedicated to you, the artist.” In the introduction to *An Illustrated Life*, Gregory talks to his reader:

I hope they [the book’s collaborators] will all encourage you to buy a little blank book and start recording the contents of your medicine cabinet, fellow passengers on your commute, the clutter on your desk. Whether you are an artist, a designer, a writer, a musician or a CPA [accountant], I hope you’ll discover the richness, the adventure and the endless horizons of your own illustrated life. (Gregory 2008:7)

In this universe, becoming a sketcher is a journey of self-knowledge, which transforms the person and confers identity. These are drawings where the “objects” “do not exist in themselves, but as “objects drawn by somebody.” As John Berger tells us, the drawing of a tree does not show a tree but

9 Gregory (2003:13).

10 The quotes are from *Reflections and Shadows*, Steinberg (2002:70).

“a tree-being-looked-at.” Teresa Carneiro adds to this idea, writing that the drawings produced by sketchers tell us “something about the person drawing” and about the conditions “in which each drawing was made,” as though they revealed “a consciousness of the experience of seeing itself.”¹¹

Drawing the city | Drawing what?

Drawing a city isn’t just capturing it on paper, it’s really about getting to know it, to feel it, to make it your own. (Nina Johansson, correspondent of the blog Urban Sketchers, in Stockholm, Sweden)¹²



In Danny Gregory’s work, the themes covered by the drawings are broad in scope and contain a strong element of observing the private universe: personal objects, pets, friends, self-portraits. At the same time, since *Everyday Matters*, the city of New York has played a prominent role in his identity as a sketcher. Gregory calls the city one of the world’s four “creative Meccas” (alongside Los Angeles, Paris and London); these are the places his readers should go in search of stimulating ideas and people. His own books, notebooks and online publications are full of drawings of New York, as well as dozens of sketches of other cities visited on trips.

As their name for themselves, *urban sketchers*, emphasizes, drawing urban space is a core value in their observational universe. The sketcher’s relation to his or her own city or to the cities visited while travelling is one of the project’s distinguishing features. The names of the observed cities are contained in the title of the blogs, webpages and books and in most of the captions to the drawings in the USK universe. The entire international symposium of the USK in Lisbon was organized around the idea of “drawing the city.” “Its notebook featured a drawing of Lisbon on the cover, a map of the city on the back cover and a program in which *all* the workshops were named after the locations where the drawings had been made.

Gabi Campanario’s newspaper column and blog are called “Seattle Sketcher” and are intended as an “illustrated diary” “of life in the region. As

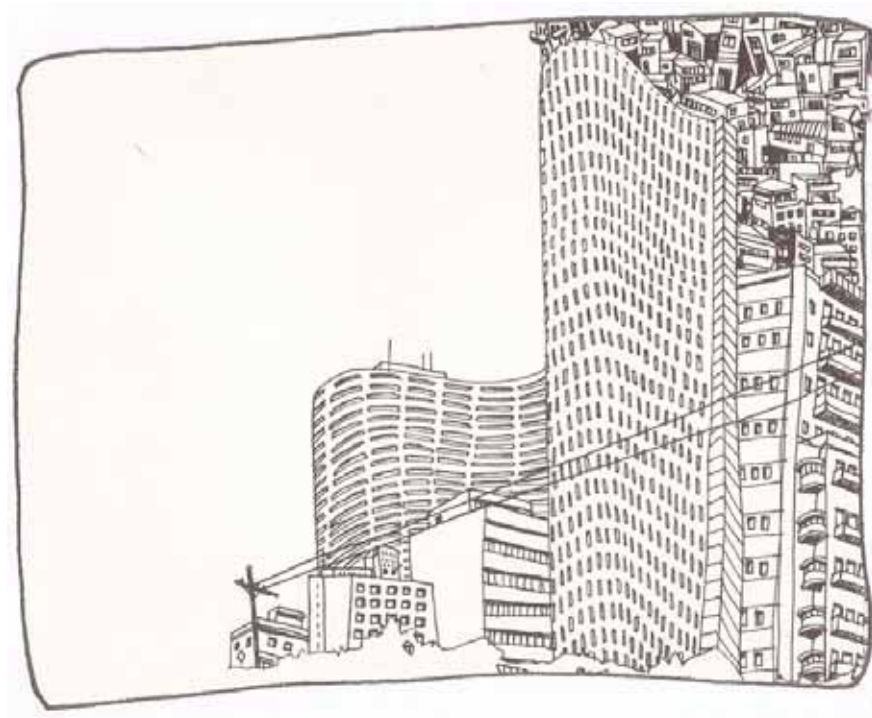
11 The passage from Berger (2005) is cited by Teresa Carneiro in Salavisa (2011).

12 Published in the section “About us” “on the blog Urban Sketchers, available at <http://www.urbansketchers.org/p/about-usk.html>.

well as drawings made “in situ,” “the journalist-illustrator writes about the drawn theme, provides a back history and interviews people related to the subject (public officials, city inhabitants, traders, etc.). The model is journalistic reporting in the image-text style, but with the added artisanal and creative dimension of the drawing process, including references to the choice of colours, materials and other elements from the world of the arts.



Dozens of other urban sketchers focus on the city as the main theme of their drawings. Paul Heaston, for example, became a prominent figure in the group on the basis of his project of drawing all the buildings along the Main Street of Bozeman, in the state of Montana, USA. Pete Scully, present at USK’s two international symposia, has been drawing the main streets of the city of Davis, California, in a Moleskine sketchbook in a format known as “Japanese” (since its pages fold out accordion-style). Nina Johansson, whose quote is presented at the start of this section, was a workshop instructor at the USK symposium in Lisbon and one of her favorite themes is scenes of a city street in Stockholm, Sweden.



“São Paulo”, António Jorge Gonçalves 2010

At the 2011 event in Portugal, the six lectures given were related to the theme of drawing in an urban environment. Ruth Rosengarten produced an in-depth analysis of the history and academic debates surrounding the issue (which I will discuss later). James Richards highlighted the renewed value attributed to hand-made observational drawing in communication projects, architecture and entertainment. Matthew Brehm discussed how to teach architectural students to draw “on location,” “emphasizing various elements present in the USK manifesto. Antonio Jorge Gonçalves described a travel project that involved him drawing subway passengers in ten cities of the planet, leading to the book *Subway Life*. Tia Boom Sim, meanwhile, told how she and the group of sketchers from USK-Singapore ended up unleashing a process of “rediscovery” “and “revaluation” “of one of the city’s neighbourhoods through drawing. Simonetta Capecchi showed drawings made from behind the scenes of the project “The L’Aquila Earthquake: a collective report.” “Following delays with reconstruction work in the aftermath of the tragedy, which resulted in 300 deaths and 1,600 injured people, and led to the complete evacuation of the Italian city of L’Aquila for more than a year, a group decided to draw the location and, through these drawings, tell its history and that of its inhabitants.¹³

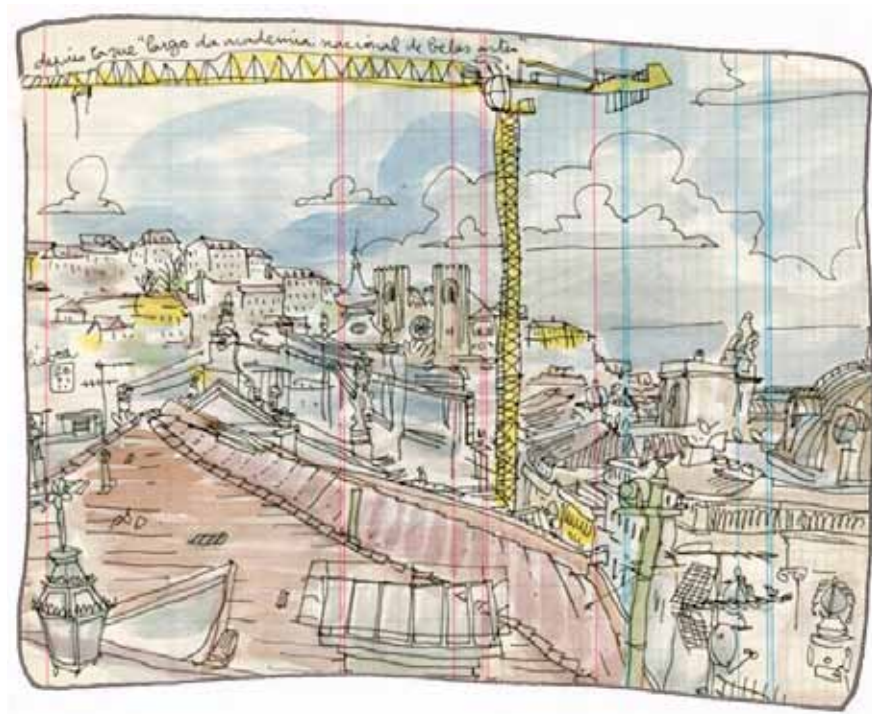
Draw how? | Devices

To draw the city, one of the trademarks of the USK universe is the use of sketchbooks. These may be small, with blank or grid paper, Japanese-style, made by famous brands (like Moleskine) or handmade. They may also be very specific, like old accounting books, which became a symbol readily identified with Lapin, the nickname of Julien Fassel, a French illustrator living in Barcelona, a member of the USK board and a figure admired by urban sketchers across the world.

A sketchbook with texts and drawings, writes Gregory (2008:2), can become the sketcher’s “therapist,” “his or her “crying towel,” “but much more than this. In *Creative License*, he provides his readers with a list of at least ten reasons for drawing in diaries: they are compact, portable, cheap, personal, useful, accumulative, familiar, stimulate drawing with the “right-side of the

13 All the links to the blogs of the cited lecturers can be found at <http://symposium.urbansketchers.org>.

brain,” “provide an escape valve, comprise a form of art, a form of meditation, private or public, and enable your mistakes to be hidden. “Hate a drawing?” jokes Gregory, “Turn the page. Start again.”¹⁴



Lisbon”, Lapin 2011

Aside from the principles already cited – “drawing to see,” “don’t be a perfect sketcher,” “draw the city” and use sketchbooks for their drawings – the universe of urban sketchers (delimited here through their manifesto, blogs and a selection of representative works) is full of “devices” “that establish rules and conditions for making drawings.

I use the concept of “device” “as found in the definition of the documentary cinema of João Salles, explained by Arbel Griner:

Salles uses the term *device* to describe the “rule,” “prison” “or “limits” that the

14 Gregory (2006:51). The expression “draw with the right-side of the brain” became famous through the title of the book (and the method) of Betty Edwards (2005) and, in brief, means making an observational drawing divested of the intellectually known “concepts” relating to the observed objects. The work is widely cited in books and blogs in the USK universe.

documentary maker imposes on himself when making a film. For him this is one of the fundamental questions of the documentary, since it translates the way in which the documentary maker organizes and *informs/shapes* the film – a reflection too of his way of framing the world. (Griner 2010:46)

Similarly the drawings of the urban sketchers are not “simply” drawings: they are “informed-shaped” by a particular “worldview.” Drawings are defined by the locality surrounding the sketcher (“on location”), the use of direct observation (contrasting with drawing from memory), the search for a narrative (telling a story based on the observed world) and the providing of a context (time and place). There is a moral basis (be truthful to what is observed) and a philosophical basis (“show the world, drawing by drawing,” which can be likened to the Chinese saying: “a thousand-mile journey begins with one step”). There is respect for diversity and individual styles, as well as the principle of not distinguishing between artists and non-artists, implicit in the defence of the sketchbook (rather than the art gallery) and their collective and non-commercial identity (we support each other, draw in a group and share our drawings online).



Based on these general devices, very often an individual sketcher establishes his or her own rules, such as drawing “every day” (various authors in Salavisa 2008); drawing for a month just the “clothes from your closet” (Gregory 2006); draw “always standing up,” to avoid feeling “too comfortable” (M. Brehm);¹⁵ draw anything “in less than 30 minutes” (Steel 2010) or draw on very personal media, such as the aforementioned “old accounting books” used by Lapin.

As in the documentaries made by Salles, Gonçalves (2010) in his project *Subway Life* set a list of rules or “devices” for himself: draw people in the subway; draw people full-length, but not the surrounding environment; do not “select” a particular character for the drawing: he forces himself to draw the passenger in front of him (to get around the idea of the “desire” for the drawn object); draw only in “square notebooks” (a personal “passion,” later abandoned, the author says, when he arrived in New York and discovered “passengers too big” for the format); draw in subways of ten different cities; and draw all the lines of the chosen subway system, at all times during the

15 Information given by Matthew Brehm in his workshop at the 2nd USK Symposium in Lisbon.

working day, in daily sessions of three to six hours.¹⁶

Deepening our understanding of these different devices, here no more than outlined, is perhaps a good way to comprehend how the urban sketchers relate with the city through drawings. Put otherwise, we could ask: how are the sketchers' drawings constructed through the ways in which they "frame" the city?

Designing a project | The research proposal

In 2012, a group affiliated to the Urban Sketchers organization will be created in Brazil, with representatives from Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and other cities. This innovation, arising from the participation of Brazilians on the blog network and at the USK event in Lisbon, was one of the reasons that led me to formulate a research project about urban sketchers in Rio de Janeiro. The existence of this local social base made the idea of producing an ethnography much more concrete.



As a "sketcher" myself and an urban anthropologist – I have conducted research in this area for twenty years now – I glimpsed an ideal opportunity for a fieldwork project in which drawing and the city are densely interwoven. Rio de Janeiro indeed has a long history as a "drawn city."

The research proposal thus emerges from the convergence of these three domains: the "urban sketchers," the city of Rio de Janeiro and anthropological theory. We have a universe of (networked) social actors, a research locus (the city, the starting point extended through the networks) and a theoretical-methodological approach (taken from anthropology, but in dialogue with other traditions). The *problem* that emerges from this conjuncture can be compared to what Cornélia Eckert has identified as one of the main challenges facing urban anthropology today: conceiving the city through a "plurality of agencies" and the circulation of new forms of ethnographic knowledge, such as those from the online and audio-visual domains.¹⁷

Everything gained further substance when I read the text by Oscar Wilde,

¹⁶ Devices presented by António Jorge Gonçalves in his lecture at the 2nd USK Symposium in Lisbon.

¹⁷ Eckert (2010:180).

The Decay of Lying: an Observation.¹⁸ This small essay, written in the form of dialogues, contains one of the author's most famous phrases: "life imitates art far more than art imitates life." A maxim so familiar that it arouses little attention. However, when placed in its original context, that is, in the arguments of Wilde's characters, it reveals a profoundly anthropological approach to the relation between artistic production and social life:

Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. (...) People see fogs not because there are fogs but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects. There may have been fogs for centuries in London. I dare say there were. But no one saw them, and so we do not know anything about them. They did not exist till Art had invented them.¹⁹

What do the forms produced by art teach us about the city of Rio de Janeiro and how to see it? Who draws which city? How are different gazes onto the city produced? Which areas, themes and elements of the city are selected, delimited and drawn? What relations are developed between sketchers and the city in the process of constructing their graphic "narratives"? What meanings emerge from these drawings? What are the continuities and ruptures of the graphic and symbolic constructions of the city over the course of its history?

These are some of the questions that the research project aims to answer.

Anthropology, city, drawing | The bibliographic illusion

What is drawing? How does one get there? It's working one's way through an invisible iron wall that seems to stand between what one *feels* and what one *can do*. (Vincent Van Gogh, *Van Gogh Letters*, n.274)

Van Gogh describes the difficulty of working one's way through the "invisible wall" separating what the artists sees (and feels) from what his or her drawing produces.

"Exactitude is not truth," says Matisse in his *Writings and reflections on art* [available only in French or Portuguese: *Escritos e reflexões sobre arte*]. We need

¹⁸ My thanks to Alberto Goyena for this precious reading suggestion.

¹⁹ Wilde (1889). Available at <http://www.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/phil%20of%20art/wildetext.htm>.

to take into account the “profound feeling of the artist before the objects that he has chosen,” without presuming that a “combination of exact details” that are “patiently assembled” can enable the recreation of nature in a drawing (p. 192, free translation).

Like Matisse and Van Gogh, Paul Klee also reflected on the need of the artist to feel, select and find his way:

Art does not reproduce the visible; rather it makes visible. (...) There has to be some region common to spectators and artists in which a mutual approximation is possible and where the artist does not need to appear as something apart, but a creator that, like the reader, was hurled without warning into a multiform world and, like the reader, has to find his own way, for good or ill.

(Paul Klee, *Sobre a arte moderna e outros ensaios*, free translation, p. 52)



I would venture to say that Van Gogh’s “invisible wall,” Matisse’s unproductive search for “exact details” or Klee’s evocation of the drifting of the “multiform world” all provide useful analogies for the difficulty faced by the researcher confronted by the vast range of works referring to the themes of his or her research.

The more works we read and the more classes we teach about this literature, the more aware we become of its complexity and more conscious still of the huge amount of texts we have to “leave out.” Faced with the profusion of already read works and other, almost infinite possibilities for our desires to pursue (through online bookstores), we feel like Jacinto de Tormes, a character in *A cidade e as serras* by Eça de Queirós, who became paralyzed staring at his library of more than 30,000 volumes, unsure which to read before going to sleep.

Here I glean a little comfort from the seven pages written by Luiz Fernando Duarte in his foreword to the collection *Horizontes das ciências sociais: Antropologia*. In this text, he discusses what *could* have been included in the work, but was not for a series of entirely understandable practical and theoretical motives. Obviously, the difficulties faced in organizing a work of this magnitude cannot be compared with those involved in a simple research project. In making the comparison, I simply wish to emphasize what Duarte defines as essential to the “objectivity” of the choices present in any scientific investigation:

Hence the classification presented in each article is objective only insofar

as its author makes apparent, even if only implicitly, the bias informing it. (...) The only possible guarantee of the “scientificity” of our forms of knowledge is this: maintaining doubt and debate open always, submitting each statement to comparative, historical and empirical debate.” (Duarte 2010:19-20)

Here I follow Duarte’s lead, looking to avoid the production of a “bibliographic illusion” – to paraphrase Pierre Bourdieu’s famous expression concerning autobiographic narratives and their tendency to present lived events as “coherent” wholes, animated by the “totalizing” and “artificial” production of meaning.²⁰

Consequently I start by highlighting the areas I could investigate for a research project on drawing and the city, but shall be unable to cover sufficiently, due to the choices made, time demands and personal limitations. Some areas are present, such as the anthropology and sociology of art, as well as visual anthropology, but comprise vast fields of reflection with which I intend to dialogue in more depth in the future.²¹ Others, such as the universe of communication, new technologies, design and urban planning, are briefly mentioned only and will comprise bibliographic areas providing support as and when needed.²²

Returning to the idea of the three main domains – urban sketchers, the city of Rio de Janeiro and anthropological theory – I present below some of the different sets of sources and bibliographic references that will help develop my ethnographic investigation.



I discovered the universe of urban sketchers through the internet and a little later through works published in the United States and Portugal. The two key authors who I would pick out as the core of this literary production are Danny Gregory (2003, 2006, 2008) and Eduardo Salavisa (2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2011). Both are not only authors, but also editors of books featuring samples of work by dozens of other sketchers of various backgrounds and styles.²³ Gonçalves (2010) and Steel (2010) are two different examples of works that reproduce sketchbooks. The

20 Bourdieu (1986:184-5).

21 Sources here include Bourdieu (1996b), Lagrou (2002, 2007 and 2009), Dabul (2001), Villas Bôas (2008), Novaes (2010), Barbosa, Cunha & Hikiji (2009), Peixoto (1999), Gonçalves (2008), among others.

22 On the world of illustration, see the important work by Cavalcante (2010). In terms of thinking about Rio de Janeiro from an urbanistic, sociological and historical viewpoint, I highlight the works of Santos (1981), Abreu (1987), Ferreira (2000), Freitag (2009), Oliveira & Fernandes (2010) and Pinheiro (2010).

23 Another important work of this kind was published in June 2011, edited by Cathy Johnson (2011) and including the collaboration of several of the sketchers mentioned here.

first is the outcome of a large project, the second is a booklet printed and sold by the author herself. These publications (always in interaction with their respective blogs) will comprise sources for the research, but they also dialogue with the academic field. An especially rich source here is the introduction by Salavisa (2008) on the world of sketchbooks, travel notebooks and graphic diaries throughout history by different kinds of artists, like Eugène Delacroix, Edward Hopper, Frida Kahlo, Pablo Picasso, Le Corbusier, among others.²⁴ Both this text and the paper written by Ruth Rosengarten – an art historian, as well as an artist and urban sketcher herself – contain a selected academic bibliography and numerous questions that converge with the aims of the proposed research. The latter author highlights some of the central themes of the USK project: observational drawing “on location,” drawing as a “witness” and drawings made during “urban walking.” She concludes:

Historically, somewhere in the middle of the spectrum between apparent objectivity and declared subjectivity, sits the sketchbook as traveller’s companion and ethnographer’s tool, recording not only the urban and natural surroundings, but also the lives and customs of foreign people in far flung lands. (Rosengarten, 2011:4)

Rosengarten suggests a likeness between sketchers, historians and anthropologists, all of whom produce detailed observations of “everyday life” in the city. For the author Michel de Certeau, reflection is central: someone who wanders the streets may lose sight of the whole, but engages in a rich bodily and sensory exploration, absorbing the city’s spaces in a new way.²⁵

A sketcher too, the anthropologist Manoel João Ramos claims that drawing is an opportunity to “participate in a world” that is not one’s own, creating “imaginary” orders and organizing “lived experiences” in memory. Moreover, the act of drawing, in contrast to taking photographs or filming, allows a more open dialogue with the “people with whom the traveller comes face-to-face.” For Ramos, the gesture of drawing is especially important in the ethnographer’s case since it becomes an invitation to the native “to look, to dialogue with him, to grant him the status of a human being.”²⁶

24 Another example, published in Brazil, are Debret’s *Cadernos de Viagem* from 1816 (in the bibliography, see Debret 2006).

25 These ideas appear in Certeau (2000), cited by Rosengarten (2011). On this topic, we can also pick out Goffman (1975) and Machado Pais (2009), among others.

26 Manoel João Ramos’s text is published in Salavisa (2011), pages 152-3. In the future I hope to be able



Returning to the idea of drawing as a means of knowing the city, we head to Brazil, more precisely São Paulo, and the words of the architect and illustrator Paula Caffé. She begins by emphasizing the value of drawing in the street, “being” and “living” in the city:

Remaining local makes a lot of difference to drawing: because of the bustle, the pedestrians, the climate. I think it’s really important to let your mind wander in the location. (...) I also like to draw in a *boteco* (bar), a *padoca* (bakery),²⁷ on any street corner. I draw much better than when in my studio. In the book *Avenida Paulista* I revived this methodology of drawing in the street.²⁸

Here I would also highlight her appreciation of how this act of drawing “on location” becomes a new form of “seeing” (in the sense that we explored in the initial section of the project) and appropriating the city:

Another thing I noticed while making the book is: *how important it is for us to draw our city, in the sense of putting it on the map. (...) I hope my drawing inspires people to draw their own city. Because I think drawing is a form of knowledge. By drawing, you end up knowing many things; you end up discovering many things. Not just inner things, your things, but things that are out there, to be drawn.* (my italics)²⁹



Contemporary projects like *Avenida Paulista*, dedicated exclusively to drawing in cities (or drawings of cities), are fairly rare in the international literature or in Brazil, even taking into account the rich fictional – and sometimes also documental – collection of graphic novels, which have led to volumes like *New York: Life in the Big City* (Eisner 2006). There is a recent book about sketchbooks, also published in São Paulo, though not specifically focused on drawing the city (Almeida & Bassetto 2010). In Rio de Janeiro, there are a few tourist guides that are illustrated entirely with drawings and one publication that stands out: *Rio de Janeiro: les carnets de*

to develop a comparison between this concept of “lived experience” through drawing and that of “lived theory” through ethnography, as proposed by Peirano (2006). Still in the field of anthropological research with graphic art, I would cite the fundamental work of Els Lagrou (2007, 2009) on Amerindian indigenous designs, and that of Fruzzetti & Östör (2007) on art among Naya women in India.

27 “Padaria” (bakery) in São Paulo slang.

28 Interview about the book *Avenida Paulista* (Caffé 2009) for the site of Editora Cosac & Naify. Available at: <http://editora.cosacnaify.com.br/ObraSinopse/10224/Av-Paulista.aspx>.

29 The source is the same cited in the previous note. Caffé was also the author of an award-winning column, *Cidade Nua* [Naked City], with drawings and texts about the city of São Paulo, published in the magazine of the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper between 1991 and 1994.

Voyage de Jano.³⁰ There are also some publications produced to accompany exhibitions of humorous drawings, cartoons and illustrations, such as that by Caruso (2009). All these are important reference works for developing the idea of a “semantic landscape” in the city’s recent history (1975-2011).

If we go back in time, the number of works becomes incalculable.³¹ Even if we focus on the city of Rio de Janeiro alone, it would be impossible to list everything that has been published. There are the worlds of maps (Castro 2000), travellers (Ermakoff 2011), postcards (Gerodetti & Cornejo 2004), the city’s history (Sandroni 2010), magazines and the press (Lustosa 2010), illustrators (Simioni 2002), books (El Far 2004), and much more.



Rio de Janeiro, J. Carlos, 1937-1939

Among the works that can be cited here, *O bonde e a linha: um perfil de J. Carlos* (Loredano 2002) and *O Rio de J. Carlos* (Loredano & Ventura 1998) both stand out for their specific focus on the relation between a sketcher (illustrator) and the city of Rio de Janeiro. Through texts and images, the authors show us how the mutual influences evolved between the newly urbanized society and its expression in the drawings of J. Carlos. The different streets, public figures, neighbourhoods, automobiles, beach, football and the

30 See Goslin (2010), Rebelo (2007) and Jano’s book in Michel (2001).

31 Compared to the 19th century, the 20th century shows a steady decline in the predominance of drawing in forms of artistic expression. This is an interesting theme that could be explored in the research. On this topic, see the extremely detailed study by Korzenik (1985) on the teaching of drawing in American schools in the 19th and 20th centuries.

buildings... so many objects and themes drawn in a style very close to what Julia O'Donnell has called an "ethnographic temperament."³²

This interpretation (of J. Carlos) would really need to be justified here through a careful analysis of the images in question. But postponing this work for now, given the time and space restrictions, I cite instead a series of works that will be important to the development of this type of approach. As well as Barthes (1990), Gombrich (1995 and 1999), Chipp (1988), Garner (2008), Ingold (2007) and Lagrou (2009), I consider the approach of the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg (1989 and 2010) particularly fertile.



Inspired by anthropological theory and by the work of various authors from the intellectual circle of the art historian Aby Warburg (such as Saxl, Panofsky and Gombrich), Ginzburg proposes a relation between art and history that considers, on one hand, "works of art in the light of historical witnesses, (...) able to explain the genesis of their meaning." On the other hand, "the work of art itself and visual forms in general should be interpreted as a *sui generis* source for historical reconstruction" (1989:56). Cautious of the limits of a "purely stylistic" reading, Ginzburg looks to reconstruct "iconographic modules," as well as the "intricate networks of microscopic relations that every artistic product, even the most basic, presumes." For the author, this is the path towards a "social history of artistic expression" (2010:19).³³

Returning to the theme of urban life, seen from the viewpoint of anthropological theory, brings us to another extensive series of works. In *Antropologia da Cidade*, Michel Agier produces a summary of the area, listing its vast repertoire of traditions, especially those originating in the so-called Chicago and Manchester schools.³⁴ As Graça I. Cordeiro & Heitor Frúgoli Jr. emphasize in their foreword, the city that emerges from Agier's book is not a "theoretical abstraction," but a "relational and situational city" in which the creative dimension of its inhabitants is valued through ethnographic investigation.

32 O'Donnell (2008) coined this concept in her dense analysis of the relation between João do Rio's work and the city of Rio de Janeiro.

33 On other themes in the work of Ginzburg, see Kuschner (1993). For an in-depth discussion of the relations between anthropology and history, see Darnton (1986 and 1990). I also suggest Le Goff (1998) on art and the city from a historical perspective.

34 As well as Agier's synthesis (2011), heavily inspired by Hannerz (1980), various other edited works and texts look to provide a panorama of anthropological research conducted in cities: Amin (2002), Augé (1997), Fox (1977), Giner (2004), Gmelch (2002), Gutwirth (2010), Low (2005), Rogers (1995) and Sanjek (1990).

Seen in this light, we can recall the exemplary monographies of Whyte (2005) and Mitchell (2010) - studies that still influence urban anthropologists today.³⁵ In Brazil urban anthropology developed in São Paulo through the work of Ruth Cardoso and Eunice Durham. In Rio de Janeiro the same development took place in the 1970s, principally through the work of Gilberto Velho and his students. Velho's work also formed the basis for a productive dialogue between urban studies carried out in Brazil and Portugal. From the generation of former students of Ruth Cardoso at USP, we can also highlight the work of Guilherme Magnani, founder of the Urban Anthropology Nucleus (NAU).³⁶

It is also worth recalling Velho's text in the introduction to *Antropologia urbana: Cultura e sociedade no Brasil e em Portugal*, where he restates his concern to avoid "reifying the urban," with the risk of isolating it from its "socio-historical and cultural contexts." Urban anthropology, says Velho, is not only "the research that anthropologists undertake in cities." It also includes the investigation of broader ideological frameworks resulting from sociocultural diversity and complexity, as shown by Simmel, Park and Barth, among others.

Here I wish to emphasize just one of the themes raised by urban research and identified by Velho: the question of the city's moral regions, natural areas and social maps. This aspect is also explored in the article by Cordeiro & Costa (1999) about Lisbon's Bica and Alfama districts. By showing the intricate narratives of these localities, the authors reveal a complex "field of possibilities" in which individuals relate "in diverse ways with the different kinds of living conditions in which they are inserted," circulating "between social spheres and universes of meaning." In this way, they go about constructing their "everyday practices, their life projects and their frameworks of

35 In the US, under the influence of Simmel (1967, 1971, 1978, 2006), we cannot fail to cite Park (1967), Wirth (1967) and other authors collected in Velho, O. (1967). In the Chicago tradition, I would also highlight the works of Hughes (1993) and Becker (1982, 2007, 2009). There are also the exemplary ethnographies of Gans (1962) and Jankowski (1991). In the English tradition, we can pick out the fundamental collection of Feldman-Bianco (2010), including contributing authors such as Gluckman (2010), Mayer (2010) and Van Velsen (2010). Here I would also cite Epstein (1969), Mitchell (1969), Bott (1976) and Barth (2000). The study by Elias & Scotson (2000) is also an important reference work for understanding 20th century urban life.

36 For works by Gilberto Velho, see the list provided in the bibliography. For works by other Brazilian authors, see Cardoso (1986), Cavalcanti (2006 and 2010), Duarte & Velho (2010), Durham (1973), Durham & Cardoso (1973), Eckert (2010), Eckert & Rocha (2005), Frehse & Leite (2010), Frúgoli Jr. (2006 and 2007), Frúgoli, Andrade & Peixoto (2006), Gomes & Frúgoli Jr. (2010), Kuschmir (2000, 2003), Magnani (1984, 2000, 2002 and 2003), Moura (2003 and 2010), O'Donnell (2008 and 2011), Oliven (1980 and 1985), Peixoto (2006), Vianna (1988 and 1997) and Zaluar (1985). In relation to urban research in Portugal, see Cordeiro (1997 and 2003), Cordeiro & Costa (1999), Costa (2003), Fortuna & Leite (2009) and Lima & Sarró (2006).

value.” Analyzing the disputes surrounding these urban districts, the authors show “a variety of mythographs, images and narratives [...] that each city chooses to adorn.” Adopting much the same approach, Castro (1999) shows us, through the transformation of cartographic representations of Rio de Janeiro, different forms in which the tourist experiences the city, constructed from “narratives and images that very often clash and vie with each other,” as if in distinct “provinces of meaning,” in Alfred Schutz’s terms.



Chicago, Steinberg 1952

I conclude this theoretical-bibliographic journey by returning to the theme of “drawing the city” and the words of Saul Steinberg, summarizing many of the points discussed here through his recollections of drawing New York’s streets:

In 1950, I did drawings more or less from life of American landscapes, streets in America, things by now vanished. No one at the time took an interest on those things; American painters were looking for places, corners, that look like “real painting”; even on Main Street they looked for a little bit of English painting or something out of Rembrandt or Vermeer. There were a number of painters in New York — Reginald Marsh, for example — who look

for Hogarths or Rubenses on 14th Street. (Steinberg 2002:74)

As I have described over the course of this text, the proposed research will employ an interdisciplinary approach, involving sources and knowledge from areas like anthropology, history, the arts, sociology and so on. The dialogue between these traditions leads to a deeper understanding of the actions, beliefs and values present in urban life.

However anthropological theory will comprise the central axis of the investigation. This implies a constant effort to reflect on our own representations, exploring to the limits the process of denaturalizing the linguistic and visual concepts involved. It also means taking ethnographic reflection as the main theoretical tool, both in the fieldwork itself, and in the investigation of sources and archives.³⁷

For all these reasons, I conclude this text with a small autobiographical note: I was a student in the PUC-Rio Industrial Design course for a number of terms, and was also a student at the Parque Lage School of Visual Arts (Escola de Artes Visuais: EAV), where I took a course in observational drawing, run by Professor Manoel Fernandes, between March 2008 and March 2009. Since then I have frequented open drawing courses in places like the Botanical School and the EAV itself.³⁸ In July 2011 I took part as a student in the II International Urban Sketching Symposium, in Lisbon, where workshops and lectures were given by more than thirty teachers who came from every continent.³⁹ The experience played a decisive role in leading me to the present research theme since, beyond the explicit aims of teaching and encouraging the production of drawings, the Symposium generated a wide-ranging debate on the role of drawing in urban life. So I end this text by pressing the “pause” button. The research is just beginning.

37 On methodological questions, see Malinowski (1978), Velho (1981), Becker (1993, 2007), Leach (1982), Sahlins (1997), Geertz (1997 and 2001), Kuschnir (2003), O'Donnell (2008) and Castro (2008).

38 Regarding my work in the audio-visual area, I should also note that I was a professor in the Department of Social Communication at PUC-Rio for sixteen years, where I offered courses with a special focus on discourse analysis, iconography and film narrative. I have worked in research studies on television and political advertising. I was a consultant for the documentary film *Vocação do poder* (2006, Eduardo Escorel and José Joffily). And in 2007 I was also one of coordinators of the team that developed the project “Social scientists from Portuguese-speaking countries: life histories” – renewed in 2010 under the titles “Audio-visual history of the Social Sciences in the Community of Portuguese Language Countries” (www.fgv.br/cpdoc/cientistassociais).

39 The full program of the event can be found here: <http://symposium.urbansketchers.org/>.

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40 The urban anthropology texts on Rio de Janeiro, such as those of Gilberto Velho and Julia O'Donnell, are listed in the general and theoretical bibliography. Works on Rio de Janeiro, but focused on the artists who drew them, such as those of Loredano, are found in the initial bibliographic section. This small selection of texts on Rio de Janeiro is not intended as a comprehensive overview of the theme, which is indeed vast, as shown by Ferreira (2000) and several of the cited authors.

1(1): 34-53.

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