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4-11-15

Fig. 1. Drawing #09.2. Santa Maria del Fiore Cupola, Florence, Italy. 4 November 2015. Image by the author.

HOW TO BE A (GRAND) TOURIST: A 90 DAYS DRAWING EXPERIENCE

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For an architect, travelling has always been an informal but significant source of education. From the end of the 17th to the middle of the 19th century, the “Grand Tour” was one of the most vital experiences to expect after one’s education in art or architecture. However, despite the benefits of popularization, travelling has been impoverished by tourism as an industry, transforming tourists into in a serious problem to contemporary conservation. From the perspective of a visitor, the author of this article describes a 90 days’ drawing experience to enhance the observation of monuments. While outlining his own formation, the author supports the necessity of a way for travelling to be redefined as a significant research experience, especially for young architects or students, so as to reconnect to our “grand” ancestors.

Keywords:

drawing – architecture – travel – Europe – monuments

As a PhD Candidate, I have spent significant time over the past 2 years attending classes, reading, taking notes, writing papers and helping my research group to develop their projects. However, being an Architect myself, I always struggle in the academic life. After spending years in college learning on a daily basis how to express and to create by using drawing and representation methods, I realized that trying to accomplish a well written paper is a double task; it is not only the research itself but also the different way of thinking that needs to be learned quickly.

From my experience, an architect should be innovative and somewhat unconventional. But that is quite rare nowadays. Still, let us face the fact that most of us get our diplomas without having a clue on how to apply those concepts and, in some sense, how to succeed. Actually this is why architects tend to rely too much on informal education methods such as group studies, office internships and, the most delightful one: travelling.

Before formal architectural education, travelling was how I started to draw. In the 80’s, when Brazil was not at its best, my parents somehow always managed their budget to take my brother and myself from São Paulo to some distant place by car, for several days. I was always very stimulated by these trips and, no matter what the destination was, I constantly felt a great

excitement, such that I never got from anything else. For example, before I was even ten years old I could see the modern architecture of Brasilia, the beautiful landscapes of Rio de Janeiro and the Italian immigrant vineyard culture of Rio Grande do Sul. Needless to say how these blurred memories make me feel very privileged: I could always see how big and different every journey was, an impossible treat for a child to fully acknowledge. So, since very little, the need to fully record the “on the road” experience always made me eager to grab a pencil and try to reconstruct what I was seeing, making some maps for my teachers and my friends, realizing that the famous “My Holidays” essay could surely be written in a different language.

As time went by, most architects that I studied with and professors from the architectural history and conservation field – soon to become my academic pursuit – they all agreed on the importance of travelling for the sake of developing new concepts and researching different ways to solve common problems. But that was all. Because when asked, no one could explain how to turn a trip into a true benefit for architectural education. “It is up to you to find references for creation”, said one project design teacher to a confused me.

A tip came up when I was in Portugal for an interchange program at the Oporto Faculty of Architecture, namely



Fig. 2. Drawings #28.2, #30.2, #33.1, and #33.4. Luxor, Aswan and Cairo, Egypt. 23-29 November 2015. Images by the author.

the sketch notebook assignment for the “History of Portuguese Architecture” course, coordinated by professor Alexandre Alves Costa in the 4th academic year. The exercise consisted in spending our summer vacation taking a trip inside Portugal documenting its architecture by hand, preferably in those villages with vernacular key elements that could be characterized as a reflection of materials’ availability and popular geniusness.

Around 2000, architecture was believed to be driven out of many known analogical instruments of production, due to the computer-aided-design (CAD) revolution. Digital cameras too had a significant impact on students and young professionals on a daily basis, as an easy way to record images, use them in projects and develop new forms of expression. Within

this context and in spite of the fact that the Faculty was already aware of this, a drawing exercise in a history class gained a new task: a way to reclaim a traditional method to understand reality, because that is what drawing does after all. When you stand before something and draw it, your mind is forced to perceive according to your references and experiences. To a trained conservation professional for instance, form, texture, color and alterations offer insights on what happened to a monument; and this can benefit investigation in other fields too. Even though this information can nowadays be collected with a high-resolution photography or a 3D Scan – always something will be missed because there is no way whatsoever for comprehension to be achieved by a machine. So, an in situ do-it-yourself on paper “reconstruction” (a representation) forces



Fig. 3. Drawings #36.1 and #68.1. Santa Croce and Medici Chapels, Florence Italy. 1st December 2015 and 2nd January 2016. Image by the author.

you to decodify the subject in single elements, to go back and forth, to look at your object from different angles, not to mention the tools for this expression (a pen, a pencil, a piece of chalk, watercolors, etc.); all these lead the way for you to organize your own thoughts. This is definitely so different from just taking a picture or dealing with a CAD drawing at the office. It expresses learning and expands time.

In fact, while at the discipline we were motivated to recognize and produce a series of historical landscapes, not just for the exercise itself – and for the sake of Portuguese monuments preservation –, but also for triggering the students' inquisitiveness, the ability to see the world and learn from it (Costa, 2007). The combination of this experience with my childhood memories helped me comprehend that an architect's notebook was not just a collection of the expression of one's ideas – notes collected on a random day that its owner could use for a project in the office – but also a way to embody history, or, rephrasing what my former teacher at São Paulo might have wanted to say, built architecture solutions given by the past.

Going back in history we find that travelling for this purpose is not something new. From the end of the 17th to the middle of the 19th century the "Grand Tour" was one of the most important experiences to expect after one's education in art or architecture. Restricted at first to aristocrats and later to rich merchants and art enthusiasts well-established in European cities, it served as a rite of passage for many artists whose objective was to get in touch with old landscapes, ruins and what was believed to be exotic cultures.

Actually it was also an escape from the transformations brought about by the Industrial Revolution, making the "Grand Tour" part of a wider European phenomenon. The new technological possibilities presented by the acceleration of production were the reason for an economic shift which affected art and modern science too.

At first the notion of time changed, affecting the relationship with other cultures of the past. Beauty for example couldn't be universal anymore because it began to be interpreted as the construction of precepts by some given civilization. Within a nationalist

context, this issue definitely defied the notion of a "timeless art" and the pursuit of perfection. On the other hand, dealing with that new notion also meant dealing with the desire for a "proof" of historical beauty in the European culture. This is when the notion of historical monument appeared (Choay, 1996) along with the emergence of archaeology as a science which could, by approaching the pieces of stone and statues left behind by ancient civilizations, resignify the authenticity of many texts against false historical assumptions.

So time, as a relative and not an absolute asset represented in archaeological findings, became a collectible quality on stratified objects. As a result, the fulfillment of an artist no longer relied on referring to a roman poet at an English garden but on acknowledging him at the place where his poetry was written. That is why, for example, landscape paintings or engravings known as vedute became very popular, as well as the cult for monuments and the artistic ability to combine them in a "picturesque" composition.

Centuries therefore before the revivalism of urban sketching in social medias, the "taste for the place" is what modern tourism inherited from the "Grand Tour" experiences. And it is quite plausible until today. We should, however, not forget that at the time it was also a difficult activity, thus making it even more interesting. To arrive in Italy, the most common destination of many famous artists, architects and art historians like Beckford, Pratt, Goethe, Winckelmann and sometime later Ruskin and Viollet-Le-Duc, one should travel through inhospitable places, facing plenty of practical difficulties.

Tourism in our days is not like that anymore. You can plan everything online, get to your destination within hours by plane or even visit them previously in platforms like Google Earth, Street View or Art Project. There is no true challenge anymore. But still, prepare yourself to see people collecting thousands of images in their cell-phones, even in yours! That doesn't mean you may not have some entertainment too. In the digital age, aesthetics changed, visualization in art changed, but, as Benjamin (1999) stated, our desire for images has only grown. Today, merit goes to popularization, yet along came the negative aspects of massification. Travelling is now a product within



Fig. 4. Drawings #52.2 and #49.2. Piazza Carrara and Lungarno Pacinotti, Pisa, Italy. 14 and 17 December 2015. Image by the author.

an industry that may be impoverishing the travel experience itself. If one realizes this early enough, it becomes easy to find a balance.

So, when my University endorsed a 90 days research trip to Europe to collect data for my Ph.D., I saw a big opportunity. I did not think twice before accepting the challenge of such an experience and benefit not just academically but also personally.

The idea was very simple.

The trip was planned according to institutional availabilities from October 27, 2015 to January, 24 2016, 12 weeks in total. The first and last weeks were to be spent in Turin, according to an interchange agreement with the Polytechnic University, including brief stop-overs in Amsterdam for the flights to and from São Paulo. Most of the data for my thesis were on institutions in Florence and in Pisa, so this is where I spent most of the time. However, visits were made to Siena, Bologna and Rome. A conference in Egypt on the last week of November added an extension to the adventure as well as a Christmas break trip to Berlin and Potsdam to spend it with friends.

With this itinerary in mind, I started a visual journal with one simple rule: between all the work to be done

at the universities, the professors to be in touch with or the libraries to visit, I should definitely manage to draw at least one page a day in a A5 notebook, converted into my personal collection of “engravings” – some of which illustrate this article. In fact, the subject didn’t matter; it was important to document something which could be appealing to the eye and visually summarize what happened on that particular day. That was a self-given task, which for me only drawing could perform, due to my formal and informal education over the years.

With these operational guidelines in mind, looking at a landscape, a monument or even groceries for about 20 minutes to one hour, followed by the simple act of trying to represent it, enabled me to not just focus observation on form, color, structure and materiality – all of them needed for a good drawing – but also to find a way to enhance significance.

Special mention should be made to the tools: just a pen was really needed. Besides having a light-weight companion (or several because they kept getting lost every time!), I was very keen to develop one specific trait of my drawing style, mostly acquired from experiences in archaeological works and professional surveying of monuments: the ability to comprehend proportions directly, that is, on how the



Fig. 5. A fake “Goethe” in Potsdam, Germany. 25 December 2015. Image by Erika Werner.

surface of given objects or scenes appeared to me as single pieces of information. The idea was to try and render images just with black ink but also without any support from other typical drawing features such as grids or lines of force. The fulfillment of drawing was accomplished after a photograph was taken opposite the documented subject, establishing the site connection and validating the observation experience.

With these simple principles in mind, day after day the results were published in social medias like Instagram¹ and they will be part of a Tumblr website called “Posologia”², where the full collection of 120 drawings may be found with some descriptions and observations about the experience (yes, I could not help it; one day was not enough!).

I was truly so very happy to see how successful the drawings gradually became, with people asking me to make copies, sometimes even frame them, or even write an article about them. I modestly admit not to have expected it. I certainly noticed the improvement when comparing some of the first ones to those made after one or two months of practice. Prato green marbles after war reconstructions, the dull moments in the libraries, all of them gained a whole new significance for me. But what fascinated me most, as a young professor, was the urge to do something different; what I saw here was the possibility to reconnect to what was “grand” in tourism, in other words research.

I first got this feeling when a very nice Chinese guy, on the top of Giotto’s Campanile in Florence, started

¹ Instagram account: @pmugf. Available at <<http://www.instagram.com/pmugf>>. Despite some reasoned criticism one might have about the growth of the application and its indiscriminated use for personal publicity and marketing, Instagram for me is still a very useful tool to create a personal visual notebook of travel experiences and talk to friends interested on them. For these drawings specifically, check pictures dating back November 2015 to January 2016.

² “Posologia”, a term often used in pharmacy as a combination of greek words ποσόν “quantity” and λόγος “reason”, is a project available at <<http://posologiaproject.tumblr.com>>.

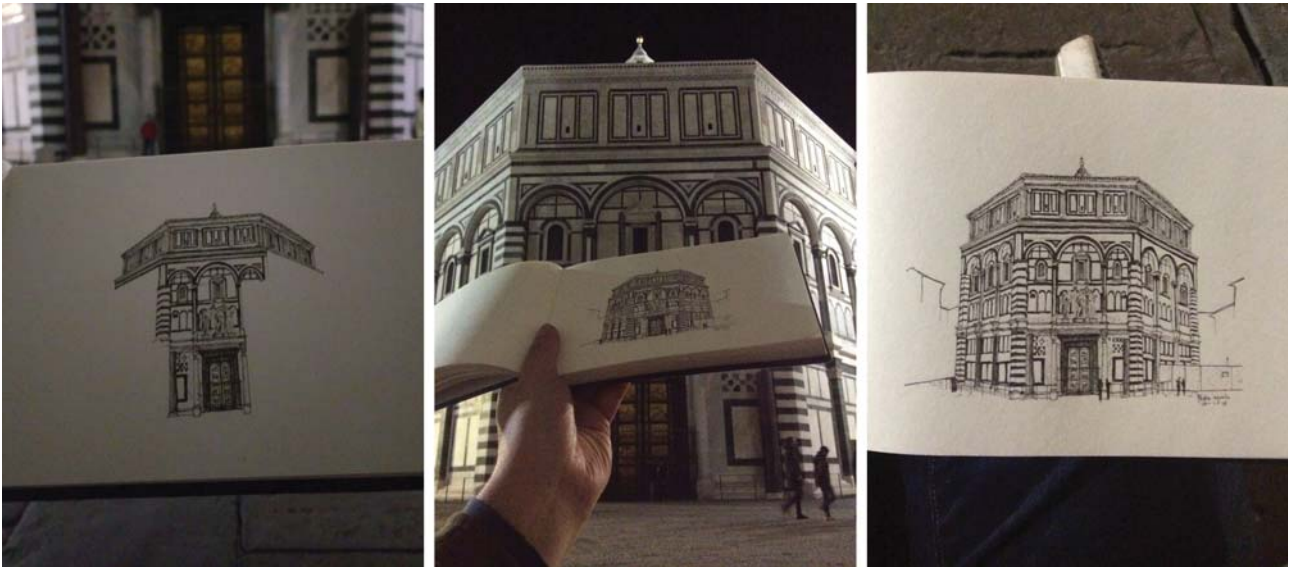


Fig. 6. Drawing #82.1: Prospettiva. Florence, Italy. 16 January 2015. Images by the author.

to take photos of me working on the drawing which is the coverpage for this text. At first, I was a little disturbed, especially because, well, in a way, I felt just like him. But later on I realized that we had lots of differences of approach, which made me more part of the scenery than he was. But it is in Egypt, when I saw the eagerness for tourism consumption due to the political crisis the country was experiencing, with serious consequences for the conservation of Egyptian monuments, that I could finally formulate the question lingering at the back of my mind: what's the meaning of travelling if you do not help yourself find new ways to connect?

So, the message is: drop your cameras. Do not rely too much on the peep hole. If you are an architecture

student on an Erasmus trip, the responsibility doubles: there are years of history to be responsible for. As Goethe (1885, p. 213) once wrote (and there's no parody intended this time), "On these travels I have learnt one thing at least: how to travel well". The secret is to believe in experience with purpose. Methods exist, but it remains only with you to make things happen.

Received: 25 July 2016

Published: 5 July 2017



Fig. 7. Drawing #65,1: Retrospectiva. Florence, Italy. 30 December 2015. Images by the author.

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