

Lisbon images and 4 metaphysical dissertations on waterfront urban design: vision, move, ethics, and interdisciplinarity.

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Resume

Representations of urban utopia, so relevant in recent waterfront projects, challenges us before anything else to understand change - the inevitable mutability of cities. Public art, architecture, landscape design and other urban design disciplines that operate the new kind of postindustrial urban projects, must question themselves about their own actions, in the processes of change.

Being obvious that i won't be able to do these things alone, i purpose myself to start with two lines of thought - that certainly will be returned to in the debates, first about city as image and movement, following the two parts of the sentence: The eyes that see // moving cities.

After that, a set of thopics on the theory of interdisciplinarity regarding city questions and on the importance of ethics in it, as it is a fact that ethic values draw a significative role in all design cultures, specially when they are concerned with cities, and life in them.

To preface it all, the visual cenario of Lisbon's waterfront, and some short inspirations.

Foreword

A pot is formed from clay. But the empty space within it is the essence of the pot.

Lao Tse

I come from Lisbon. Like in other cities changes have occurred regarding urban activities and the waterfront is somehow the showcase. Like in other cities urban design and art projects must be questioned about their own participation in the process of change. This is about the evaluation of our experiences, but also about us and our knowledge concerning cities, today.

Today we have the capacity to instantaneously connect distant things. So, is there a new type of public space? To answer that, we need to widen our fields of thought, in a way that things far away start looking near in our mind, like in the strange organizational method of Alberti in his final book of "the art of building":

Since we are talking about restoring buildings we need to inquire into what causes buildings to deteriorate, one of those causes being water. That being so, i will talk about water in various forms - swamps, water supplies,



wells, springs, cisterns, the planning and irrigation of vines, rivers...Now rivers are used to transport goods and so are roads and canals, so i will talk for a moment about the construction of highways and the digging of canals. And since a prime concern with canals is the maintenance of their banks, i will talk about the seashore, which like a canal-bank is a meeting of water and land...

Perhaps new forms of urban life are evolving in unsuspected places, perhaps not so conducive to personal relationships nor to the close cohabitation with past or context that we keep tending to look for in public space, but yet have a sort of adequacy or userfriendliness, and a new kind of intermodal and energetic centrality.

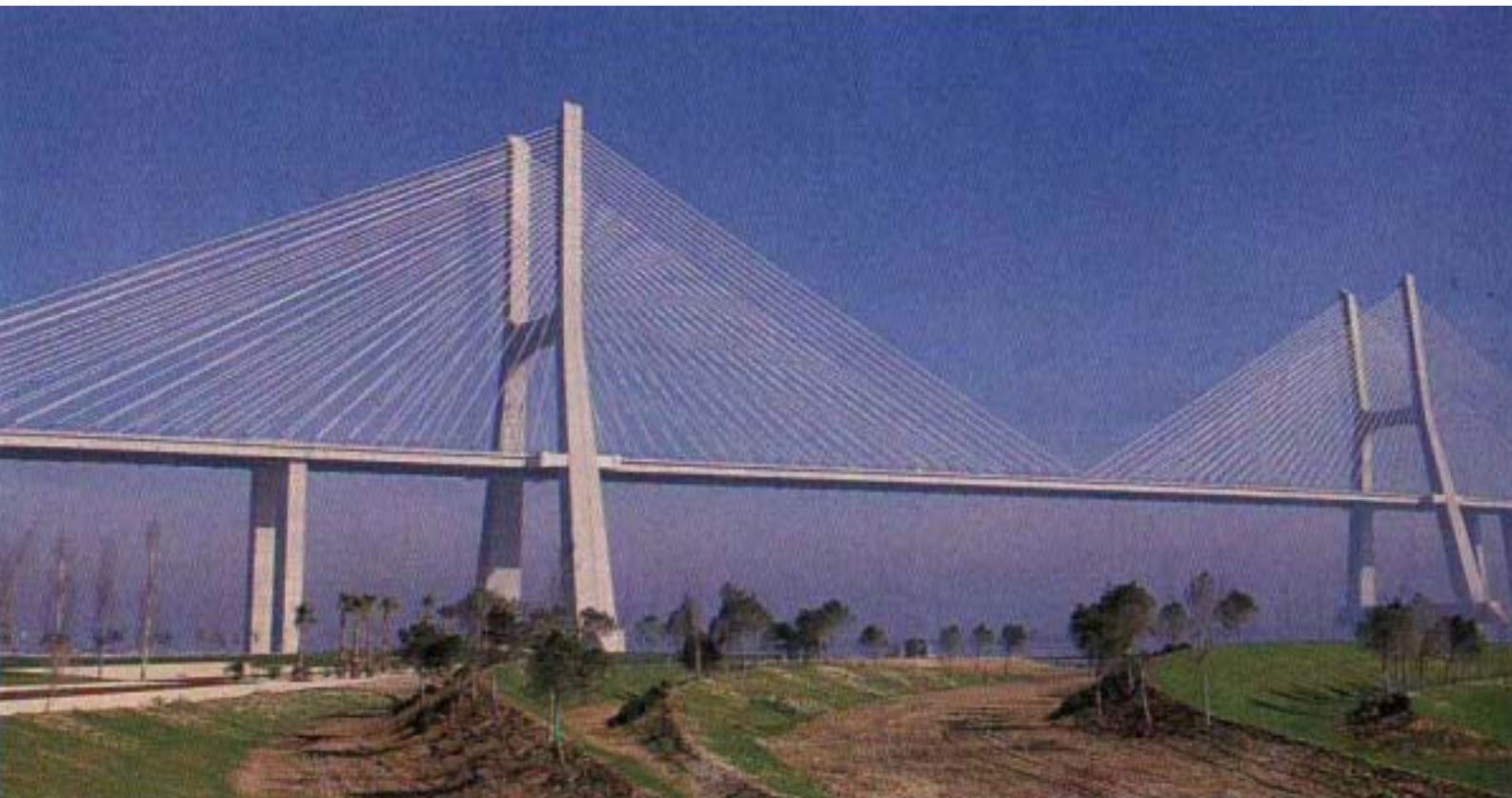
The new kind of public places that our cities now are breeding should not serve us merely to certify a pessimist parti-pris about the "state of things". On the contrary, even if they seem aggressive and inhuman, comercial or superficial, we could accept that new places have a part on architecture, landscaping, art, and vice-versa : whenever the contemporary design cultures are working together to give a meaning to the places of our lives, they have a part .



1. Dissertations on city as image - the eyes that see

You see things; and you say, "why?". But i dream things that never were; and say, "Why not?"

Bernard Shaw



Today it isn't easy to make clear one dissertation on cities without a bridge to the visions of other fields of knowledge. Literature, History, Geography, Anthropology, Arts, together with Design disciplines, are the eyes that see. And if vision is tending to assume too large a role in the evaluation of reality, truth is that urban life, is more than vision.

Cities in images - a critical cartography

Photography provides us with amazing sequences of documents of the successive states of the city landscape. Historically it stimulated new media supports of the city's common image such as the picture postcard. By that way photography helped the spreading of interest in architecture and city landscape. In our days still more and more of that interest on cities depends on the culture of images.

Curiously cities are not photographable...because to take a picture is to frame, to select by excluding, and the city is just the oposit. What is not inside the frame is the smel and the sound and the move of life.

City Landscape in film - errant spaces

If photography is the choice of a point of view, a selective technique that reveals or conceals the landscape, on the other hand cinema, by taking the mobility of the eye for granted, cutting and editing, gives us a not merely contemplative landscape, but a part of the argument, the performing of new forms in our lives.

Often cinema announces the radical contradiction between place and human relation, by chosing as a set ambiance, errant spaces like highways, hotel rooms, petrol stations, trains, airports. As in a novel, place gives grist to life or vice-versa. Does in that way our city landscape become really understandable?

Architecture and Literature - something about names

Architecture is difficult to communicate. Specially by wording because it's language belongs first of all to space, to volume, to light. To trie to explain it in the registrar of words, out of it's own thing, is like to look for animals at the butcher's - They are surely there, but they lack a little bit of life.

We don't tell architecture and cities. But we tell stories about architecture and cities. Besides that, although there are other things in life than buildings, we have to recognize that every thing in cities has a place. City's are, at the end of the line, places and names, verbal relation.



The landscape in geography - recording the passing of time and man

Making the “anatomy” of the landscape - classifying the chief families, divisions, and their boundaries, composing an inventory of their units or components (geology, vegetation, topography, settlement).

One of geography’s main subjects, as it tries to explain the man-made landscape (physical, economical, cultural) is to develop a kind of a “landscape memory” - stratified, and by that way “historical” and “economical”, through the identification of resources, whether they be vineyards, pinewoods, mines or the means of communication.

The final perception of the “humanised landscape”, is the urban construction.



Representations in art history

To make a survey on city through art is, in itself, a journey through vastness:

- from medieval to renaissance - from city and countryside in the

same landscape, to the building as a visual sign, a definer of landscape;

- from baroque to romantic - from hierarchic landscape of axes and scales, to the new shining life;
- from futurist to rationalist - from increasing dynamics, modern and passionate, to the abstraction of function.
- from Pop to post-modern representation - humour, provocation, or triviality, or stage and set designing.

The role of art in the conscience of city landscape, i think, may lie in the sum-up of it's plural possibilities. The range of roles that we know art historically exercises, be it in description, in ephemeral emotions, in the idea of maping time in city life, in the exercising of social sarcasm or colective representation.

2. Dissertation on time - moving cities

We look at the present through a rear-view mirror
Marshall MacLuhan

Experience, is also a fleeting phenomena: we know better the city's permanence, when we see it moving - the evidences of the intertwined participation of man and places, call upon the simultaneous presence of different times. To understand and love contemporary cities we must include a movement idea.

Global and local condition

The easiest diffusion of models and information, the accessibility and mobility, has brought to our cities the signs of an ever-increasing "global landscape", by :

- simplification (restricting the range of components),
- reduction (elimination of specific or "typical"),
- standardisation (referring to a model, repeatable),
- and dislocation (indifferent to the context, virtual).

We ask ourselves if the disappearance of a local condition has been announced. Anyhow if architecture and urban design still seek contextual justification, it must be required to clarify, when and how it still makes a sense, for we can't built a contemporary landscape apart from contemporary life.

Nostalgic criteria...

In the lexicon of urban themes, "protection of the city landscape" has come to assume a defensive connotation. It's an attitude that tends to diminish the effects of changes, more





than to understand and master emerging forces, as “to make a city”

Conservative and protectionist positions in relation to the the role of art and architecture in the city, promote an idea of city as an antiques shrine or the idea that future should look like past, and to conceal the new elements of life with a fear to the unknown. Nostalgia can never therefor be the main thinking structure for the designing of contemporary cities.

...and mediatic visions

In our times dislocation is a new programme for the city landscape. The speed of modern means of transport, the nomadism of contemporary leisure in tourism, sport and communication, the dislocation by emigration, maybe are the beginning of new paradigms of the notion of place, or home, of which the city life is also a sign.

City landscape is not only a stage set. It is both a meaning and meaningful. In other words, our way of life is our landscape. If waterfront landscape has always been connected to movement (the place of meeting between diferent travellers, ships and docks, cranes and cars) today it more often is beeing specialised in the representation of a place for meeting – a metaphorical representation of past and future, work and leisure, global and local..

Lisbon story

To limit the question of city change, in time and in space, i refer to the last ten years, in Lisbon´s waterfront.

After the mid-70´s April Revolution, when housing was the central thematic of urban matters, and after the neoliberal Lisbon's management, during the 80's, offices invaded the city with a strong inflation on land value, and one fifth of the population went to live in the periphery.





The ninety's finally gave opportunity to qualitative factors. The local elections in Lisbon that would be won by the left, are disputed in relation to environmental proposals, brought to the daily agenda by an alternative ideas competition for the waterfront, by the Architects Association in 87.

Lisbon Port authority began in the early 90's a program to re-define part of the waterfront area with leisure facilities. At the same time Lisbon's subway's adopted a qualification strategy of public space with Art works stimulating a receptive attitude among the public. Urban festivals now include ephemeral artistic interventions with public art offering a kind of exemplary theme to draw the public's attention to the quality of the environment.

Rethoric exceptionality

With the political statement of Mega Ferreira about EXPO98, "The Exposition of 98 is the exposition of Democracy", it is obvious that this was the main symbolic project for Lisbons new times. In fact EXPO 98, among other rethorics, demonstrated that urban design is a concept of environmental quality, part of a globalisation experience of a creative act in the public realm.

The paradigm of totality - a new town - and the paradigm of freedom - the unlimited power of creation legitimating the design options, in the origin of the move. There was nothing left from the former: only the docks and a petrol refinery tower that were kept as a sign - as a witness. The plan, is really a "ground" project, that establishes both the rules for the "architectonic invariable", as the design of open spaces, the profile of the street layouts.

In spite of the exceptionality that was behind its origin, EXPO was designed to be a normal part of Lisbon. The proof of endurance has to be made now that the feast is over, not only in its own area, but in the Lisbon areas that are always disregarded and that surrounds it - east Lisbon.





3. Dissertation about interdisciplinarity

Beware of artists

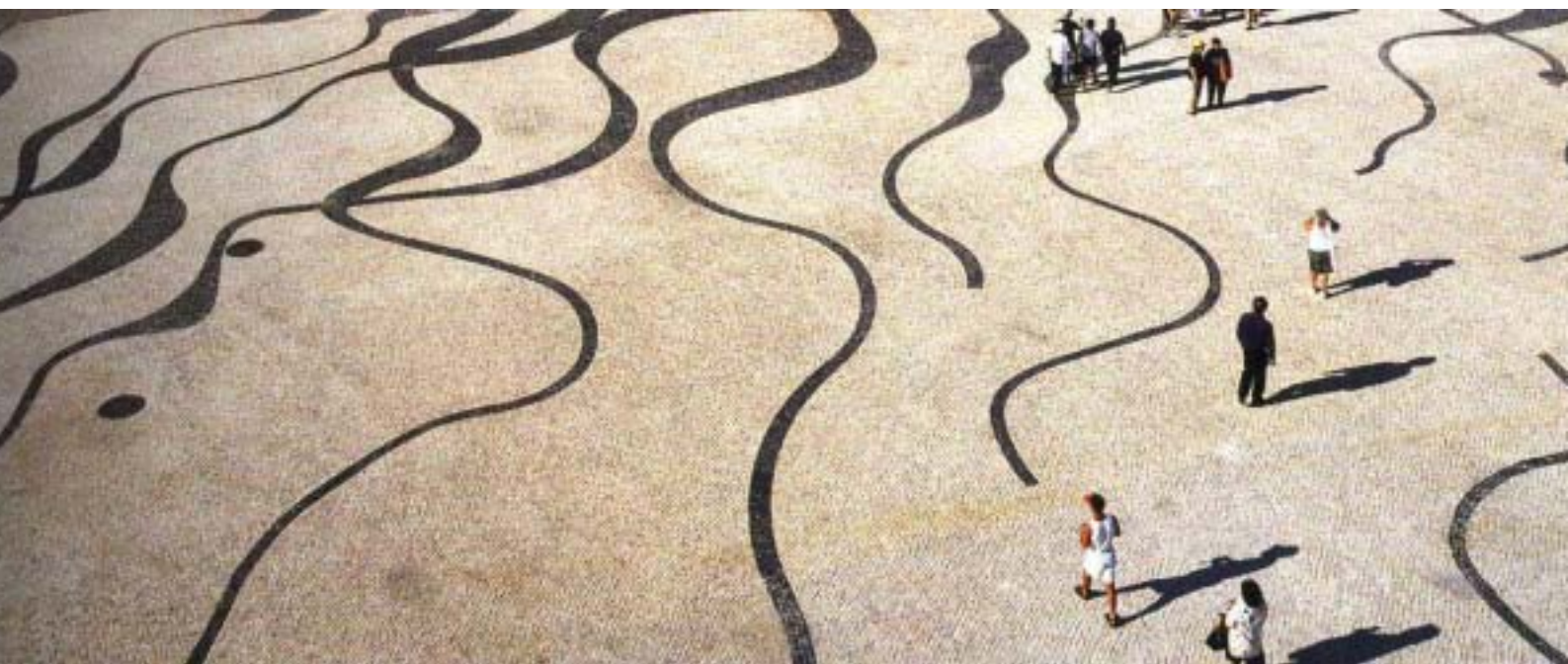
They mix with all classes of society and are therefore most dangerous. Queen Victoria

The city is the essential place of modern living. In the search for that essentiality, every discipline of knowledge aims to decode its own meaning dealing with city matters. Naturally, each professional area moves to take possession of the territory or to declare its leadership in it. It's clear that interdisciplinary in public place projects implies interaction, among different actors, concepts and subjects. Only a receptive culture can provide a plus/plus conflict resolution, in urban designing today .

A common playground

We are not just calling for classical cooperation between the arts. If we want a set of topics referring to the urgency of interdisciplinarity approaches in urban waterfront projects, we can attempt with some emergent issues:

- New questions about the quality of urban environment, for example: The new types of public spaces – are they non-places or the new city centers?
- Strategic issues of public space, such as: A “ground project” is it a system, or is it the summing of parts?
- Or issues about significance, such as how to design future prospects about the way of living – and how to give people a meaningful place in it?





Lisboa

Interdisciplinary collaboration requires mutual recognition of capacities, the search for a conceptual common playground and the managing of interdisciplinary principles and techniques.

So how does it go?

A) The public space design activities enforce a higher variety in functions and organizations that are more complex. They appeal to the competence of new professionals – lawyer, manager, public relations, commissioner, financial adviser, new technical specializations – which changes the traditional relationship between professionals, until recently limited to the traditional dialogue architect - engineer - contractor.

B) Negotiation techniques. The biggest complication in procedures involves not only the exchange of information between the different actors. It requires the arguing techniques and the working up of compromises. The traditional system of professional territories, based upon the rational division of tasks, gives little room for the negotiation mechanism of roles, freedom and power between parties.

C) The temporarily of the projects. On one hand the understanding of distant time, of the durability that is expected from a pub-

lic space structure, and at the same time the uncertainty that requires more and more consent, agreement and sense of opportunity, for the advantage of a sudden cooperation, which can put investment into practice financially or politically.

D) The communication between the relevant actors. Public space meaning is not deciphered when we present the glossy design plans and presentations. The iconographical representations formalized from our own competencies are not enough, today. There's a demand for a higher ability and creativity in communication strategy, in the range of non-professionals' reading pattern.







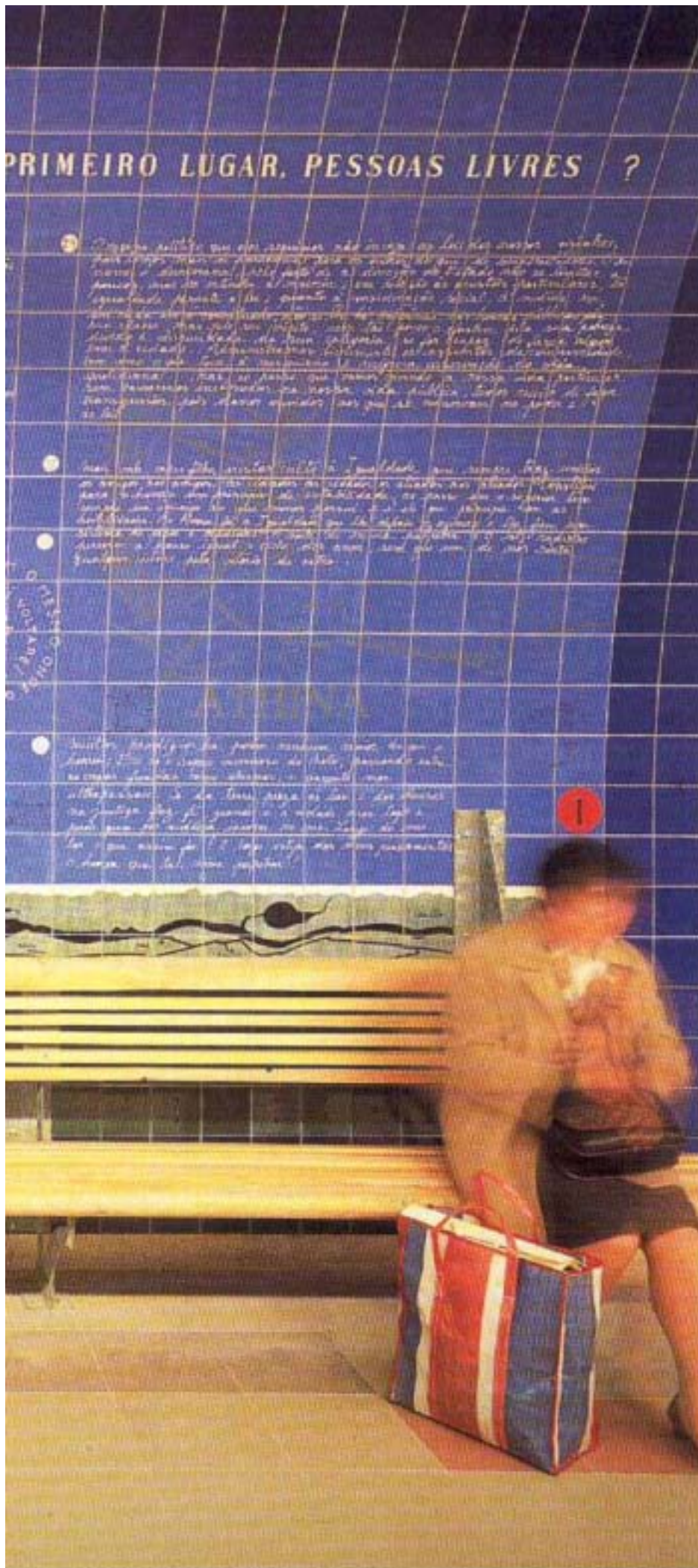


E) The dematerialization of the project design. No longer the work is marked by pre-established stages of design process, the moments where it was possible to communicate in the inside of a technical, formal or legal code. Design is now a processual definition, a sophisticated work of control, co-ordination and permanent adjustment. If the «craft» loses its traditional rhythm, the «great moments» require new forms of interaction.

Professions – values and convictions

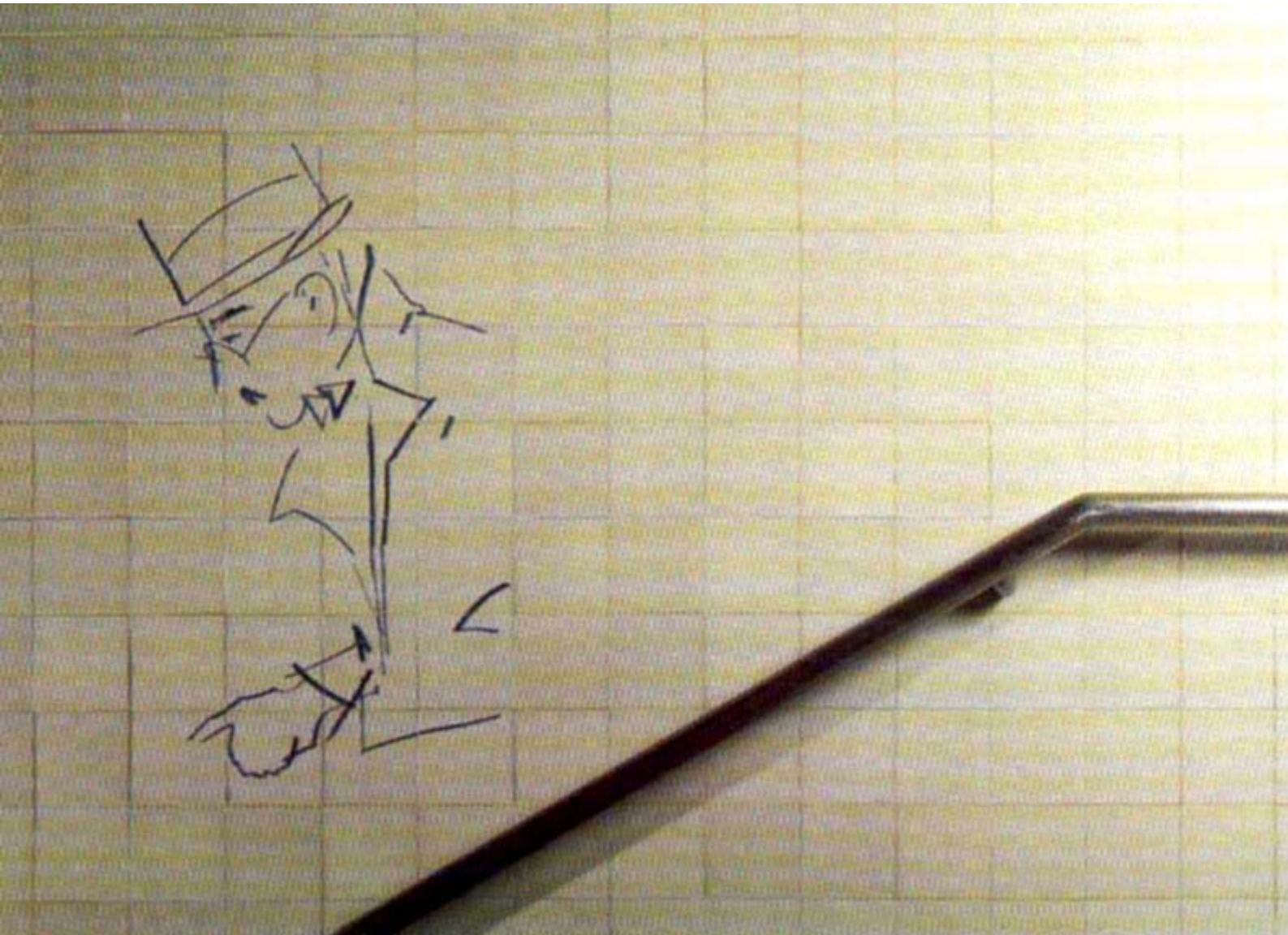
New experiences in Public Space projects, out of traditional professional limits may lead us to question professionalism. To find a better setting for interprofessional collaboration it is best to clarify what a profession is. New theories about professionalism say that profession isn't only a combination of a group of social constructs (training, rules, organization, and conduct) but is also a product of social life, depending on relations ; roles and powers ; normative conditions ; and social expectations.

If public space projects gather different professional profiles, in fact professionals all share the same interactive reality. Can we also share common values and convictions? Do we have a strolling role between design and life?



4. Dissertation on ethics and Design cultures

Art, like morality, consists in drawing the line somewhere.
Chesterton



We can say design culture has different professional subcultures: architecture, landscape architecture, visual arts, industrial design. Each of them has convictions, expressed in its own theories, manifestoes or traditions. Each of them has its own technicality, like other professionals such as engineers and city planners. But the design professional cultures also exercise a sense of mission: To provide the good life.

a) The architectural culture has roots in two intellectual European traditions:

- Classicism from the 18 and 19 centuries with “Beauxarts” academy and state “Grand Travaux” public architecture, a strong mythology that still today typically drives many architectural studios way of life.
- Idealist tradition coming from modern heroic references of the 20’s, the mainstream of the Hegelian beliefs that history

moves through great ideologies, in the construction of a new world, and a new man.

b) The landscape architectural main culture has different intellectual tools:

- Naturalism, coming back to Rousseau's argument that we are the most human near the state of nature. The nature as wildness, as a refuge specially from poor urban culture;
- Ecology, the understanding of territory, how nature works and what it means so as to truly know how to make things happen as they really are supposed to be.



c) Industrial design also brings a set of convictions to nourish its practice:

- The empiricist idea of Arts and Crafts movement, of a designer again working side by side with craftsman, to create simplicity and truth in everyday life artefacts;
- The functionalist ideals of Art Nouveau and Bauhaus for cosmopolitan happiness, providing products and ambiance with modern taste and practical life for common people's.

d) Visual arts with its contemporary sequence of styles in its "spirit of the time" bothways mission:

- Romanticism, with its topics on imagination, perpetual innovation and permanent creativity, justified on the grounds of individual artistic vision and sense of freedom;
- Realism, searching the every day life meaning, be it in the ordinary, even vulgar or ugly expression of community expectations and identification.

The Other



Rationalism, Idealism, Naturalism, Ecology, Empiricism, Functionalism, Romanticism, Realism – how can we find in them one only ethical tradition? Although we acknowledge the trend to separate design cultures, and that after time passes some of these beliefs and convictions seem like superficial dis-

putes, the fact is that design professionals value beliefs, more than techniques, in their pursuit of the common good.

The "other", that essential moral category of public space design, can be seen as the «public», the object of the show being staged, or as «users», that is, those who will live public space. The meaning is in the use, says Wittgenstein. The meaning of public place is only fulfilled in the final relation with life values. The "other", therefore, is the center of design process.

Public space is an eloquent manifestation of urban life, life of people in the space between buildings, translated in the infinity and diversity of contacts in which city is manifested as a part in our lives. Public space is not only the biggest attraction of the city but also the place of the other.