

INTRODUCTION:
THE CONCEPTUAL UNFOLDING
OF A COLLECTIVE PROJECT

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1.

This volume is a collection of revised versions of the papers presented at the seminar “Conceptual Figures of Fragmentation and Reconfiguration”, which took place at the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, between January and June 2019. The seminar is one of the core activities of the project “Fragmentation and Reconfiguration: Experiencing the City between Art and Philosophy”, based at IFILNOVA – Nova Institute of Philosophy in Lisbon, and the present publication is an important outcome of the work developed within the project’s conceptual framework.

By exploring a creative tension between fragmentation and reconfiguration that is capable of opening up critical and differential space – for thought and practices – the main goal of this research project is to delve into the different ways in which human experience and art practices absorb and respond to the fragmentation characteristic of modern cities. This space is able to disrupt the homogeneous images of contemporary cities that have been generated by seemingly inescapable austerity policies and by the production of a touristic “authenticity” imposed by globalization processes that obscure other forms of living. Thus, the concept of fragmentation does not point to nostalgia for a lost unity. On the contrary, it belongs to an unavoidable process at work in modernity that is felt as an intensification of the “shock experience” engendered by ongoing immense technological transformations – transformations which are constantly recreating the conditions of experience. Analysis of fragments and details provides critical access to an overarching understanding of our present time, however provisory it may be. On the other hand, the concept of reconfiguration invokes the very possibility of rethinking, reconstructing,

and reimagining urban space, which is of the utmost importance not only for philosophical reflection on the city but for the artistic practices that deal with it.

Taking this into consideration, this volume endeavours to reassess the relationship (of complementarity, tension and opposition) between fragmentation and reconfiguration, a relationship that is deeply engrained in the philosophical tradition and the contemporary pertinence of which can be appreciated by focusing on the experience of the city, in particular the aesthetic experience of the city. Making use of different approaches and styles – a diversity that brings to light the richness of the project’s team – all of the chapters in this collection tackle this double philosophical dimension: on the one hand, they discuss different conceptual figures by drawing on key philosophical topics and authors (such as Goethe, Benjamin, Wittgenstein, Foucault, Deleuze, Joyce, Proust, and Perec); on the other hand, they make us think about the experience of the city at the intersection between fundamental topics of aesthetics and the examination of case studies from art (literature, painting, cinema, architecture).

2.

The volume comprises nine chapters: “An Unnatural History of Destruction” by Gianfranco Ferraro; “Ruins: Approximations” by Maria Filomena Molder; “Chaosmopolitanism: Reconfiguring James Joyce’s Cities of *Thisorder* and Exiled Selves” by Bartholomew Ryan; “Morphogenesis of Urban Space – The Scars of a City” by Maurizio Gribaudi; “The Productive Disorder of the Atlas” by Nélio Conceição; “Alain Resnais’s Entropic Archive” by João Duarte; “Collections: Paintings, Boxes, Sights and Clouds” by Maria João Gamito; “Panoramic Presentation: Conceptual and Methodological Aspects” by Alexandra Dias Fortes; “An Attempt at Elucidating a Philosophical Topic: Aesthetic Experience *of or in* the City” by Nuno Fonseca.

Each of these nine chapters focuses on a specific conceptual figure, following the structure of the original seminar presentations, which at the time fostered an ongoing debate among the research team and the seminar participants, gradually enriched with each encounter, creating resonances and counterpoints between the different figures: Catastrophe, Ruins, Chaosmopolitanism, Morphogenesis, Atlas, Archive, Collection, Panoramic Presentation, and Aesthetic Experience.

Placed at the beginning, the chapters on *Catastrophe* and *Ruins* deal most markedly with destruction and fragmentation, engaging in reflection on the transitory character of cities – and of human existence – as well as several ways of approaching and handling it. The third and fourth chapters tackle the historical, complex and conflictual dimension of modern experience, exploring in the first case the neologism *Chaosmopolitanism* (inspired by Joyce) and the condition of the exiled self and in the second case the *Morphogenesis* of the urban form of Paris. The following three chapters, focusing on *Atlas*, *Archive* and *Collection*, deal with gestures and practices that can reconfigure objects and knowledge, exploring the relationship, which comes in several forms, between order and disorder. The last two chapters address the experience of fragmentation and reconfiguration from a more methodological and broad perspective, the first expanding on Wittgenstein's *Panoramic Presentation* and the second developing a reflection on *Aesthetic Experience* off/in the city inspired by Perec's work.

The very notion of “conceptual figures” can also guide us in explaining the goals and methods behind the current publication. It accounts for a work that aims to maintain its lively and open-ended figurative character, thus allowing one to delve into a constellation of notions, authors and examples that imbue the notions of fragmentation and reconfiguration with a highly productive dynamic of *unfolding* (metamorphosis) and *detours* (following Benjamin's motto “method is detour”). This method responds to the project's guiding theoretical principles, inspired by the Goethian morphological method, in particular a dialectical tension of polarities whose poles do not cancel each other out. In this sense, the guiding concepts unfold fertilely in the different chapters. For example:

- i) Performing *dialectics*: between catastrophe, heterotopia and utopia, playing with the contrast between natural and unnatural history (Ferraro); considering ruins as communicated secrets, testimonies between recollection and expectation (Molder); between chaos, cosmos and chaosmopolitanism in a cultural and civilizational landscape in which language and the experience of the self undergo collapses and rebirths (Ryan);

re-examining order and disorder through the conception of a “productive disorder” in the atlas, in the tension between the sovereign materiality of things and the uses of memory and imagination (Conceição); in the connection between archive and entropy, with its insurmountable ambiguity manifested in the dark desire for chaos and the effort to cope with its entropic effects (Duarte).

- ii) Delving into *concrete gestures and practices*: the demolition of the urban fabric and its reconfiguration in the plans for Paris devised by Hausmann, whose description provides the economic, political and social conditions for deciphering the hidden aspects of the city’s transformations (Gribaudo); tearing objects – paintings, boxes, sights and clouds, an enigmatic replication of the very concept of collection – out of their function to bring them together in a collection (Gamito).
- iii) Developing *comprehensive gestures*: arranging colours, architectural forms and words in a panoramic presentation, simultaneously as a clear view of things/images and as a methodological concept (Fortes); questioning the multiplicity of the sensorial, multifaceted, fragmentary and intense urban experiences that provide a fruitful atmosphere for a myriad of aesthetic experiences (Fonseca).
- iv) Explicitly or implicitly, and in different ways, all of the chapters explore the tension between construction and destruction, between fragment and whole, between the singularity of each thing and the theoretical tendency to seek a wide-ranging synthesis.

3.

The reader of this volume will notice that its conceptual figures necessarily give rise to a manifold reflection on time and history, which intersect with the spatial dimension of cities. Both the paired concepts of fragmentation and reconfiguration and the experience of the city itself force us to think temporally

and historically. It is within time that the dialectical relationship between reconfiguration and fragmentation takes place (note that the terms are infinitely interchangeable; in a similar way, human constructions are infinitely threatened by destruction, or at least touched by the awareness of their ephemerality). Maria Filomena Molder's analysis of the "destructive character" (both the title of an essay by Walter Benjamin and a challenging way of seeing the relationship between nature and history) touches on the core of this character in all its fecund ambivalence. While it says something very intimate about ruins, it also says something about the archive and its entropic dimension, about the atlas and its struggle against disorder, about collection, about urban "renovations", about exile and wanderers...

Cities are historical "subjects" *par excellence*, stages and dramas of the multiple lives that inhabit and disappear in them. There is clearly a destructive side to fragmentation, linked to oblivion and the constant threat of the disappearance of communities and forms of life. On the other hand, fragmentation can also be on the side of life when it implies giving attention to details and to the life of each thing, when it presupposes the capacity to integrate the singular and the plural – beyond a reduction to the generic or to a systematic totality given beforehand. In this sense, this book makes an important contribution to our understanding not only of time, history and memory, but of how to philosophically approach such complex subjects as cities and urban aesthetic experiences.