**Rio de Janeiro 450 Years: a History of the Future**

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São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro is one of the most restless and unapproachable cities in the world.

Just name it, and it will promptly dissolve and run through your fingers. It is not like many other cities that snuggly don the body of its entire jurisdiction. The geography here is unaware of limits. No fabric could ever cover its nudity. It is less of a city than a fountain of metaphors, coinciding opposites. Rio is a huge federation of desires, attracted by the future, and devoted to it, showing no sign of resistance.

Addicted to the future, relentlessly trying to hasten it, the city is also nostalgic of an uncertain past, from which it feels exiled; or forgetful, for all that it has erased with a demolishing appetite. A Rome at war with the barbarism of speculation. Machado de Assis summarizes the Carioca vertigo: “They either changed the city, or moved me somewhere else.”

But the city is tattooed on the skin of the present, before admitting to a past that is lost and a future that is daydreamed. Because since the 1990’s Rio is once again being redesigned. The city has increased its tentacles and, within its polyphonic identity, it promotes all sorts of constituting voices and centers, from Paulo Lins’s Cidade de Deus to the suburbs of Lima Barreto, whose “wanting perception of street design contributes the flavor of democratic confusion, of perfect solidarity among city dwellers.” A post-metropolis in broad expansion, expected to be more sympathetic and democratic, with major challenges mobilizing new urban players, comprising an archipelago of identity and resilience, from Mangueira to Alemão, from Santa Marta to Rocinha.

Wounded by contradictions, a city that doesn’t lose the power of fun as it sings away in the swirl of life, a possible and desired city. We may reach the city that will come in a chorus perspective: in the lyrics by Vinícius and Cartola, in the freedom dreamt in prison cells, in the children’s sun spotted drawings, in the unmistakably red tinted procession of Saint George, in the urban graffiti rendering the city an open anonymous and collective book, in the gay parade, in the rituals of candomblé, in the faces of mothers who have brutally lost their children, in the projects that never take off, like a tunnel that would connect Rio to Niterói, in the bygone times of D. Peter II.

There is no way to exhaust the potential conjugation of tenses and modes of a wildcard city, such as ours, born to a multiform metamorphosis that grows high to seize horizons and spreads low with undergrowth arteries and fast transit, sharing old as well as new streets that complement one another.

As Pedro Nava said, “strolling in the streets of Rio requires love and knowledge. Not only local knowledge, and that of urban connections. Some genre of erudition is also necessary.” Knowledge grounded at different levels, like someone reading a palimpsest, through the tiers of time, overlays and pentimenti, like the nearly bodily presence of a living, mythical Morro do Castelo, unattainable and lost in the city’s emotional memory, with the church of São Pedro dos Clérigos, the Convento da Ajuda, and the Palácio Monroe.

Reading the palimpsest has become inflamed on a par with demolishing the perimetral viaduct, the new port zone design, and rails for light transit, which have brought back the Valongo and the São Francisco da Prainha to the eyes of beholders.

This dialog of overlays translates the passage from metropolis into post-metropolis, as Vittorio Gregoretti puts it: “the idea of a city, a territory, and nature, which have long represented strictly interrelated dialectic elements and now show themselves as an incomplete historical narrative pointing at a vast diversity of cases.”

Rio’s incompleteness is also intrinsic with the necessary refreshment of city democracy, with fairer land occupation projects that are sensitive to the movement of the homeless and that create socially controllable integrated transit systems.

Rio de Janeiro is experiencing an era of challenges—an era that awaits the cognitive mapping proposed by Edward Soja, to reach a clear political awareness of space. This is the only way that Rio de Janeiro will become a most outstanding south city in the promotion of peace and justice.

The intense research work was done on the impressive National Library collections, with their renown levels of diversity as well as accurate keeping and cataloguing systems. In addition to the specific curatorship donations, we have also sought to have an ensemble of views that would register the city’s everyday life in 2015, through the lenses of Adriana Lorete, Carlos Ivan, Felipe Varanda, Ivo Gonzalez, Marcelo Carnaval, Marcia Foletto, Pablo Jacob, Pedro Kirilos, Pedro Stephan, and Paulo Moreira. Schoolchildren from CIEP Presidente João Goulart (Cantagalo/Ipanema hillside slum community) were also invited with the special intent to draw a city designed in the future, with high lyric density, pervading a life that is simultaneously known and transfigured. And, since the city belongs to all, inmate students from the Bangu I Penitentiary Complex Angenor de Oliveira Cartola school were also actively translating the old Paulo Freire idea about Education as the practice of freedom, which is a definitive value for Rio de Janeiro locals. Highlights also to the array of pictures acquired by the National Library from the Hansheimer heirs Dorith de Pénasse Mouwen and Okky Offerhaus, including the etchings that were kindly granted by IPLANRIO. All of this is now part of the library collection.