

Perabé / Luiza Baldan

One city helps you to read another. A city is a place of memory. For travellers, your place of birth is the home you carry in your luggage to facilitate your arrival in an unknown place.

My hometown is the sea. Whenever I am feeling nostalgic for something, in any dream or nightmare, blue is what I see and the salt air is what I smell.

I was born by the sea. I moved to a place by the sea. And in every port I docked at, I left a little of the port of my departure.

So my home is the sea, in all its malleability and insistence. Waters contaminate each other, communicate with other, bring and take. As children, when we scarcely know how to read the city, the scale of the avenues and buildings is frightening. The sea is intimidating. We are small beings surrounded by great masses and volumes which teach us, early on, about hierarchy and how to live in society. As we grow up, the city also grows, but we notice it less.

The sea is the only thing that does not change over time.

All the cities where I have lived are located by the sea, except one. The sea-less city is the only one that does not cease to expand.

Walking in the sea-less city causes you to get lost and find yourself in the urban labyrinth, to collide with towers and hills, and to melt into the pollution. Flying over the sea-less city causes you to lose sight of it, to collide with towers and hills, and to melt into the pollution; to be persistent and look beyond, to find the sea. The horizon of the sea-less city is the flickering of the incandescent lights which overlap in the distance.

From the sea-less city I seek the sea. I reconstruct the routes of those who rose up out of the sea.

I lean on the rampart. It leans on the shore. Why turn your back on the sea? To the shore in the capital of solitude and its perfect sanity.

From the sea-less city I watch the sea.

The upland of *Piratininga*, *Inhapuambuçu* and its providential, unseen, dextrous heroes. The divided *Itaecerá*. The promise of *Peabiru* and the *Tupiniquin* Indians. It is not a ridge, it is an escarpment. Everything will be built on the way, among pepper trees, byways and diversions.

The *Andradian* anguish of the time before the journey, and the satisfaction of running around the world, of swimming around the world. According to the laws of the sea, the biggest always prevails.

I saw the water in the photo and asked...is the bay near the airport?...better to laugh.

And my pride increases with your guts and determination... working in a luxury hotel when, some years ago, we were humbly requesting shelter in a hotel in Ipanema.

I cannot omit the fact that when I ran from Leblon to Arpoador, it was right there that I took a wonderful dip in the sea...on the way back, I took another in Leblon.

I returned reinvigorated...

Oh, yes...I did it all again afterwards.

I felt a pang of nostalgia... I digress.

But they are good memories.

I know your sea off by heart. And the morning walk too, even though you do not remember that I chased your shadow, walking in your footprints until the sea washed them away. You, holding my hand, pinching my fingers with the ring, after the street-kid yanked the gold chain from your neck. Your sky and mine photographed from the same balcony a short time apart. A premature image like me. An image of what is immutable since the start of time.

I used to say, my sea!...in front of so much blue!

In the absence of the sea, there is the sky.

When the blues overlap and it no longer makes any sense to know who is above or below the discrete line of the horizon.

My map is a great reference of yours, Atlantic. When still a foetus, I swam in the belly of the mother. I am a *marmífero*. What I really wanted was to have been born on your shore, in the whitest cotton plantation in the world, but that would be suicide. And I really did try. In convulsive jolts, I follow your trail on broken journeys, like so many *Tamoyo* Indians, desperados, muleteers and pirates who did the same from Cabo Frio to Santos.

A crossing of profound silence, where the light blinds and the plants rustle in the piercing wind. A howling, cross-wind that hurts the ears. The heat of the midday sun punishing the white-crested guan. Crouching and rolling in the flying sand that pierces the skin and carries itself to another place. Digressing among the dunes. Being a dune.

On January 21st, they hoisted the sail and approached the land, the stifling, melancholy beaches.

The *piçaba* palm. Ships, a galleon and two caravels, one called *Rosa*. These islands have a small isle between them, and there are snakes and a dragon. An island that became a peninsula. On January 21<sup>st</sup> the frigate of *caiçaras* got lost in the sea.

A place for drying fish

A place for seeing the sea  
A place to disembark  
A place that can be seen from afar

Of all the possible paths, I chose mine. So many courses re-charted, foot after foot, without the hint of a track. Automatic routes driven by any old flow imposed by who knows who. And with so much repetition, something makes itself present. A high, monotonous chant that unexpectedly interrupts the mute solitude of the familiar walk. The stone which trips you up and alerts you to what is around you. Ostentation and recognition.

Mediated territory. There is no promised land. The *Tietê* river flows far from the sea. Suspension of betrayal.

What happens to everything that passes across your eyes? Dust, eyelashes, images... Crying and raining. Overflowing. Loamy, slippery path.

The elastic margin, the soft little wave. The border between the dry and the wet. The in-between space. The moment that precedes goose bumps. Feeling the hard sand melt. The seen land, the port, the landing place. The meeting point between what arrives, what leaves and what awaits.

Pangea divided into oceans that border inaccessible territories.

Sailors, castaways and convicts dock at the end of the beach and follow the railway line, by the safe path that leads away from the sea. Little by little, one by one, they separate. Like the ancestors who arrived in cutters and travelled by the 'English' railway up the *Serra Velha* to Jundiá.

From subterranean being to subcutaneous being, seeking in the viscera the wisdom of deeper memory. Forbears stretched across the heart.

*Gamboá*. Delays. Mysteries. Secrets. The wide ocean.

A story like this can only be built with excellence, leadership and teamwork.

People rise and fall, unconcerned about the sacrifices. The pink of the winds wraps everything in dust and sand, turning start and finish upside down. The scribbings of *saci* lead me from the back lands to the sea. Lethargy and the *cateretê* dance. I pursue the greyness that will be launched into the sea when I finally find it. To die at sea or far from the sea. *Marrer-de-si*.

I penetrate the mystery of the high wall that encloses the coastal mangroves. I distance myself from the familiar scenery. Nebulous mountain - a giant by virtue of its own hostile nature.

Unknown bad lands extending along the course of shadowy rivers.

The smell of the sea comes from who knows where, but it stupefies. Nothing beyond the thicket. The footprints of the sea air are the lichen on the tree trunks and point to the sky. The salt pollinates. Further on, by the water spout, the fountainhead of the evaporated sea, everything flows and *Iara* washes me.

In *caeté*, the *curupira* ghost guardian, whisper of the wise and the rufous-bellied thrush. A *curucutu* owl disguised as a wraith, or an old bagman, seduced by the call of *mati-taperê*.

A brief pause to taste the guava fruit and notice the colour of the tanager. The waters are many and infinite.

The repetitive, telluric noise of the path against the foot. The rattle of the footfall that rattles the wood where the rattle-snake rattles. Everything repeats. *Oxumaré*.

From a path that starts in summer and ends in spring, in the softness of the climate. Passing from one side to the other, crossing between the seasons. Rivers and mangroves. Walking on the air, half-closing one's eyes to the green of the ridge, of the footpaths. A melancholy hill isolated over the sea air, over the maritime nostalgias. *Salt-stalgias*. The forest appears and the *saçurá* imps warm their fat potbellies with *cambuci* rum.

The sticky handle and the rusty lock. Barrel of briny water. The rusted fridge and the jammed door. The misted up mirror and the musk-smelling towels. The succulent, poisonous fruit that resembles *pitanga*. Traps and cages. The window and the wind, opposing forces. The fallen angel and the little orange balls of the electric cables. Far away, the calmness of the waters of *Iemanjá*, the spirit mother of the vastness and the liquid revolts.

To take off into the curiosity of the unknown. A nomad and a stranger in one's own land. The first road to be surfaced, to be paved. The famous curves of the King's song.

*Piaçaguera Velha • Caminho do Padre José • Itutinga-Pilões • Calçada do Lorena • Estrada da Maioridade • Estrada do Vergueiro • Estrada Caminhos do Mar • Estrada Velha de Santos • Via Anchieta • Rodovia Imigrantes • Rua da Glória*, the old sea road.

Ever embarking on long journeys and ignoring terms of absence.

The sea road here was an obstacle, a steep wall that crawled and clawed up the forest. It was the centre of a trampoline for plunging into the back lands and running from the sea. The ridge isolates.

The sea road from there was a breach in the midst of the sandbar, with a low-blowing wind, which sucked up to the top of the dune. Running to the sea. The beach merges.

The sea road from beyond the sea was a vastness of possibilities. Running with the sea. The ocean carries one way. The sea so close, so far away...

Muddy curve of death. The boat at the top of the mountain. Water of the slide. The opaque city beneath the fog.

Dreaming of snakes can mean many things. Dreaming of spiders' webs means a voyage is near. Spiders are descended from aquatic arachnids. The web is a path that zigzags and winds around itself like a snake. It weaves a circular dream of damp cross-threads. A dream that bites its own tail. A low isolation trap. Circular. The silk of the architecture reflects ultraviolet light. Prey and predator. Fragile and flexible. Self-reflexive.

From where you can see the sea there is always mist, a grey candy floss of coldness and drizzle. It is from the depths of the sky that the martyrdom of the salt water comes with a hint of sweetness. Sweetness of sugar cane, of homemade buttermilk. Drenched landscape. The opposite of the dream of things focused on the sea. *Mar-si-lac*. *Mar-apé*. Proper names.

From the valley to the peak to the depression at sea-level. A topographic wave.

The *marrano* and the Indian woman. Sea and land. Adam and Eve of the lowlands. Two parallel roads.

There are tides that do not reach the ocean. The one here is a mutable sea chained to moons against the stable ocean of the eternal horizon. A tide that fills and empties. Transverse waves that generate energy. Objects that float, rise and sink without leaving their places. What changes out there in the distance we do not see. Close up, what changes, crushes.

The ocean is vastness *par excellence*. Abysmal. An escape route.

Is it possible that you escaped out there? You never knew how to swim, yet every day you floated on the edge of that transparent water showing off the red nail varnish of your submerged feet.

From the amphibian past, hands and feet that crawl and wrinkle. Antibodies that survive in marine solution. The memory of what was once our life at sea.

What is purely visible is insufficient. This mass of invented blue. The coincidences amaze me.

In an unanchored flow, learning to gradually detach, expatiating about rocks to calm my racing thoughts. Leaving the oyster to be the wind.

The mole crab that refuses to be caught in PET bottles. Desires that do not follow the currents of the sea.

I cannot fail to be moved, contemplating, contemporizing as you taught me.

Sometimes taking snaps of the landscape in movement, cataloguing the gaps between what I saw and what appeared to me.

*Omnia vincit amor subditorum*

The mountain range seen from the sea. There is the fort. The high plane, the promised land, the path of Sisyphus. The city of memory and the memory of the city. The memory that produces identity and nostalgia.

*Piaçaguera Velha*, the last *Tupi-Guarani* village of the Atlantic, gentrified.

The landscape changes. The landscape does not change. The landscape deafens.

From teenage dreams, the giant wave that rises out of the calm sea. Tachycardia. Diving, clinging to the deep sand and being overwhelmed by the enormous surf that destroys everything for kilometres. Hiccupping intensely for each of the disappeared.

From adult dreams, the giant wave that rises out of the calm sea. Tachycardia. Diving, calmly holding onto the deep sand and allowing the tremendous surf to pass over. Emerging and realizing that everything continues as before.

Waiting and casting the line. Pioneering hamlets that are worn down over time. So different from the sea-less city. The sea of the seagulls that love.

The repertoire of cities familiarizes everything. *Piratininga* • *Ipanema* • *Humaitá* • *Paquetá*  
*Nilo Peçanha*, Jair and Tito, Marlene and Ivo. The landscape becomes lovable.

The city with the sea and its legends of ghosts, volcanoes and sea-dragons. The diabolic marine monster, *Ipupiara*. The city of the sea has its diminutives and its superlatives. The cemetery where the bodies rest above the sea. The buildings that tilt in the sea air. So much more and so much less. So much sea.

*Lagamar*, *ubá* canoes, dugouts, canoes made from tree-trunks, *Lloyds* and Brazilians.

From the sea road, I unwittingly find the place of the dreams of the girl who owned the notebook that I found in the rubbish when I was a child. I pass through the streets without understanding what was so special about it for her. Understanding how relative the spatial is.

Holiday is the *Balança Mas Não Cai* of Brazil's first city.

It is impossible for there to be a path on which nobody walks. Treading on the path of so many. What comes after me went before me, because it existed before me. An ancient footpath.

Tarmac stone under the Serra of drowned forest lands. The *Manacá-da-serra* tree is white when young, pink when adult and violet when it dies. *Travessa das Violetas* number 100, house 8. An address that no longer exists. The *Quaresmeira* tree of the dense fog.

The ocean forest suffocated by the turbines of the big city. Extreme harshness. A native tree species disappears, an *embaúba* arrives. The *Quilombo* river is the corridor of escaped slaves, resistors. The path of *Cazuza*. The scent of the jaguar is the broth of lunchtime. A memory from the zoo to familiarize yourself with the forest.

Everything that turns around the stone, that lives and exists because there is stone, that is silent because there is loss.

Unblocking the nostrils with seawater, even though it is no longer possible to breathe in the water.

It is March. The lighthouse and the belvedere. The peninsula and the watchtower. Where the river meets the sea.

In the crook of the beach, the omen, the hiccup. Perfect pitch. When there is silence, the beats of the heart. The prolonged breathing that mixes with the whispering of the waves. The moist, cyclical, synchronized, resonant breath. White skin from dry salt. The idle surface of the water. I swim and the sea, nothing.

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