

Stairs

Warming ourselves up for the city of Lisbon we ascend the stairs connecting the downtown valley with the upper castle hill; it is a physical encounter where each step is heavier than its predecessor. Lisbon unravels while we climb, sweat the summer and slip through the rainy cascade. The climb is almost blind, the focus is on the endless steps that make the stairs and its embodied physicality, which is rendered totally pointless by a public lift next to it – most appreciated by the local population – but a tourist understands the exotic nature of physical effort in a neo-colonial manner that gives joy and a rare collection of memories. Step by step the collection grows.



Zambezi Point

At the top, Zambezi Point, an exceptional vista and homage to the River Zambezi, which was often the destination of the religious soldiers being produced in the many evangelic factories that emerged many years ago next to the ships departing to distant lands. Nowadays only traces of those times remain, the monasteries give place to or are about to be incorporated in high-end real estate developments that multiply the functions promised in the condominium brochure: it is a house, a bank account, a gated paradise, an open prison, a private view.

The traces of the religious and commercial trade are embedded in the structure of the city: monasteries, churches, market squares and docklands. The uses might have changed over the years but the importance of those remaining traces seem to be updated to a new world in the same location and with similar displays. The past becomes the future, a start-up promise.

Zambezi Point gives access to all these layers of the city and its river, just as in the past the river opened up the world to the city.



Saudade

In this location, next to the ruins of the Roman theatre from the city of Olisipo, there is a passageway to the secret society of Cloaca. The entrance to the world of the Cloacara – the people of the drains – was, according to an anonymous source, only possible during stormy days when the weight of the water in the sewage system would reveal the secret entrance. Nowadays is possible to observe groups of tourist attempting to create a similar effect by gathering at a specific location of the existing metal structure.

In Rua da Saudade we are also entering Fado, Fado territory, a place of echoing melancholy where people are not allowed to smile but only to retain serious faces always on the verge of crying. This contemporary appropriation of a Moorish tradition, Alfacó, was exploited during the dictatorship and through religious indoctrination, to implement the importance of having a miserable life and the joys of misery. The original Moorish tradition was a celebration of the importance of water through communal crying during daily street singing mostly performed by men while women played the special Alfacó guitar. It is unclear when this rare example of role reversal took place.



Fragments

This location is of significant importance for the sighting of the ships and for the sublime contemplation of millennial WC tiles, Azulejos depicting Lisbon. The origins of Azulejos are linked to the ancient shipping industry and the perils of sea traveling. The journey from China was long and the porcelain trade was at special risk during the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea with its frequent storms provoked by the PmurT Oscillation (Ocean-atmosphere interaction), more often than not the fragile porcelain would arrive at the port of Alzulijium in multiple pieces. It was here that a new industry flourished, from the broken pieces of porcelain the woman of the seafarers started to piece them back together and produce exquisite celebrations of their love for their sweethearts who were away at sea. The art of Azulejos developed from these activities and not long after a variety of factories were set up to fulfil the demand for Azulejos, which appropriately enough would first produce delicate porcelain that would be broken into pieces by the old, retired seafarers who no longer could go to sea before being assembled as Azulejo by the Alzulijian woman.



Corvinha

Corvinha was a famous Lisbon prostitute during the late 1600s and an important figure in high society. In a later royal document from the 1700s it was implied that she was the mother of many influential figures in the contemporary Portuguese ruling class. Corvinha was officially married to a stonemason, who carved the first stone boats, which can still be seen in the walls of the beco (alley), and who had a very tragic existence after having both his legs amputated in the various battles with the Spanish after the 1640 Restoration of Independence. Legend has it that the carved boats are sailed by lost souls so that the number of them in Alfama changes when anyone tries to count them. Among the various stories and possible interpretations for the meaning of the stone boats there are two that have attracted the most consensus among Corvinhologists: the first explanation makes a direct relation between the number of stone boats in the streets of Alfama and Corvinha's illegitimate offspring while the other suggests that Corvinha's husband understood each stone boat as religious step towards heaven and salvation. Of course, it is entirely possible that both of these interpretations are correct.

Onions

Campo das Cebolas was the location of an onion field and various onionaries. The professional Fado singers used the onions to induce crying in their audiences. In the far northern corner of the square was the most famous Fado house where groups of slaves would chop onions in its basement during the performances. The pipes currently seen in the square are the remains of the original drainage system that connected the various Fado houses in the area with the river and prevented the flooding of the area from the tears produced when the daily Fado performances were at full capacity and coincided with the high tide in the River Tejo.

The origins of the recipe for onion rings has been attributed to one of the slaves who was sold to the cotton plantations in the American South taking with him his culinary heritage of eating onions in as many different ways as days of the year. Musicologists have also speculated on the origin of the Blues in the same way. There is speculation that the pipes date back to the secret tunnels of the Cloacara, who used them to escape the city in the purges of the 5th century.



River Tagus: Untold Story

Host **Miguel Santos**
Guest **John Wainwright**



