



DÉCO IN THE CITY

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The images which follow are an invitation to journey along an asymmetric route, a passage through spaces built in a visual narrative of outstanding geometry. At times one is tempted to pause in front of the photograph and follow its straight lines and curves until it ends up in parapets, a facade, in the irons of a surround or a sculpture. The everyday familiar look sees things anew, and you might let escape a *How did I not see that before?*

Then comes a desire to see. This desire can be satisfied (or stimulated) by the unique arrangement projected within the borders of the images which are presented on the following pages and which, for one other moment, have consumed the photographer observer.

In the context of cities and towns, the desire to see is not something new, something beyond being moved either by the particular pleasure of a *voyeur's* watching, winding through the streets and submerged in the landscape, or by the inspirational desire to present. Paintings of towns by Renaissance artists gave us perspective as the main orientation of the experience of presenting, *disembodying* the observer, as Martin Jay would say (1988), a form of neutralized seeing which does not encourage any commitment to what is seen. Urban thought, the design of the town, approaches this wholesome seeing, aspiring to a rational organization which builds the space. The photograph, steeped in technology, also shares the aspiration of a building, to construct an image.

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However, the visual which summons us along the way has the subtle power of dismantling the common-place, because towns are inherent to the cultural processes and the particular representations of those who gave form to the plans. Michel de Certeau (2001) referred to *the practices of space* because he understood places and architecture itself to be references subject to appropriation. A possibility of drawing places which cannot be reduced to their mere graphical designs, goes beyond and transcends the most intrinsic subjectivities.

These constructions of the visible are blends of fragments of urban and imaginary processes, attempts at communication between people, which a town of multiple voices creates. Here Art Déco stages the town or the town stages Art Déco. So rather than concentrating purely on concepts, we invite the reader to take a look at the sizeable presence of this style of architecture in Brazilian towns and cities. And to start with, in order to discover photographs which cannot be explained in a first distracted glance, you must concentrate and let the photographed shapes declare their urban setting.

Abstraction and the decorative arts flourished in the greatest diversity of places. The effort was motivated by the search for the contemporary, but expressed in the day-to-day doings of everywhere from the hinterlands of Rio Grande do Sul to the Northeastern countryside, without excluding other States in between.

The extensive spread of the style has defied time and is present in the Brazil of today, transcending typologies, usage and functional organizations. Several buildings of the Post Office-type still exist with their original characteristics, while former cinemas have become

churches without tarnishing the style which makes them majestic.

One could then locate the ability to conceive and build the cultural environment based on references which we have made our own, in the profusion of styles in Brazil, in the moves and take-overs – the result of people's use of space. Thus the winged sculpture stalks the hinterland; organic forms imitate surrounding nature and the expression of the day-to-day marks space in times of contemplation.

Once again one must provoke the desire to see, since the very invisibility of Italo Calvino's² towns seems to have hopelessly infected the déco examples which inspired the architecture of towns in a country undergoing intense growth. An invisibility which installed itself in façades and the exaggerated renovation of buildings, and which was aggravated by the timid research and registration of this heritage.

Just like a sponge, a town soaks up this wave which ebbs from memories and dilates (...) But the town does not tell its past, it keeps it like the lines on the hand, written on the street corners, on window gratings, on the handrails of steps, on the antennae of the lightning conductors, on flag poles, each segment marked with scratches, notches nicks, and abrasions. (CALVINO, 2008: 14-15)

And what town does the reader want to see? Appreciate, then, the artifacts of the visible from the most unexpected angle, where textures, geometric forms, shapes and colors cause the revelations that the scenario can reveal, maybe even here, from the other side.

2. A reference to Italo Calvino's *As Cidades Invisíveis*, which treats of that complex symbol which is the town.



Railing at the entrance to a house
in Nepomuceno (Minas Gerais)



Grande Hotel Empresa Theater entrance
in Cambuquira (Minas Gerais)



Façade of a house covered in fulget,
in Jundiá (São Paulo)



Cine Estrela (1956)
in Ipameri (Goiás)



Window of a residential block
in Porto Alegre (Rio Grande do Sul)



Platband of a commercial building
in Caxias (Maranhão)



Bandstand in Praça do Centenário (1948)
in Santarém (Pará)



Don Bosco Church and College (1941)
in Goiânia (Goiás)



Administrative building of the
Madeira-Mamoré railway (1920s)
in Porto Velho (Rondônia)



Townhouse in São João del Rei
(Minas Gerais)



Colégio Acreano high school (1933)
in Rio Branco (Acre)



Monument in Praça Visconde de Cairu (1934),
with the Lacerda Elevator (1930)
in the background in Salvador (Bahia)



Obelisk in Praça Vicente Dutra (1947),
with church in the background
in Iraí (Rio Grande do Sul)



Rádium Hotel (1938)
in Cipó (Bahia)



Monument to the
Constitutional Revolution (1947)
in Piracicaba (São Paulo)



Detail on the door of a commercial building in Natal (Rio Grande do Norte)