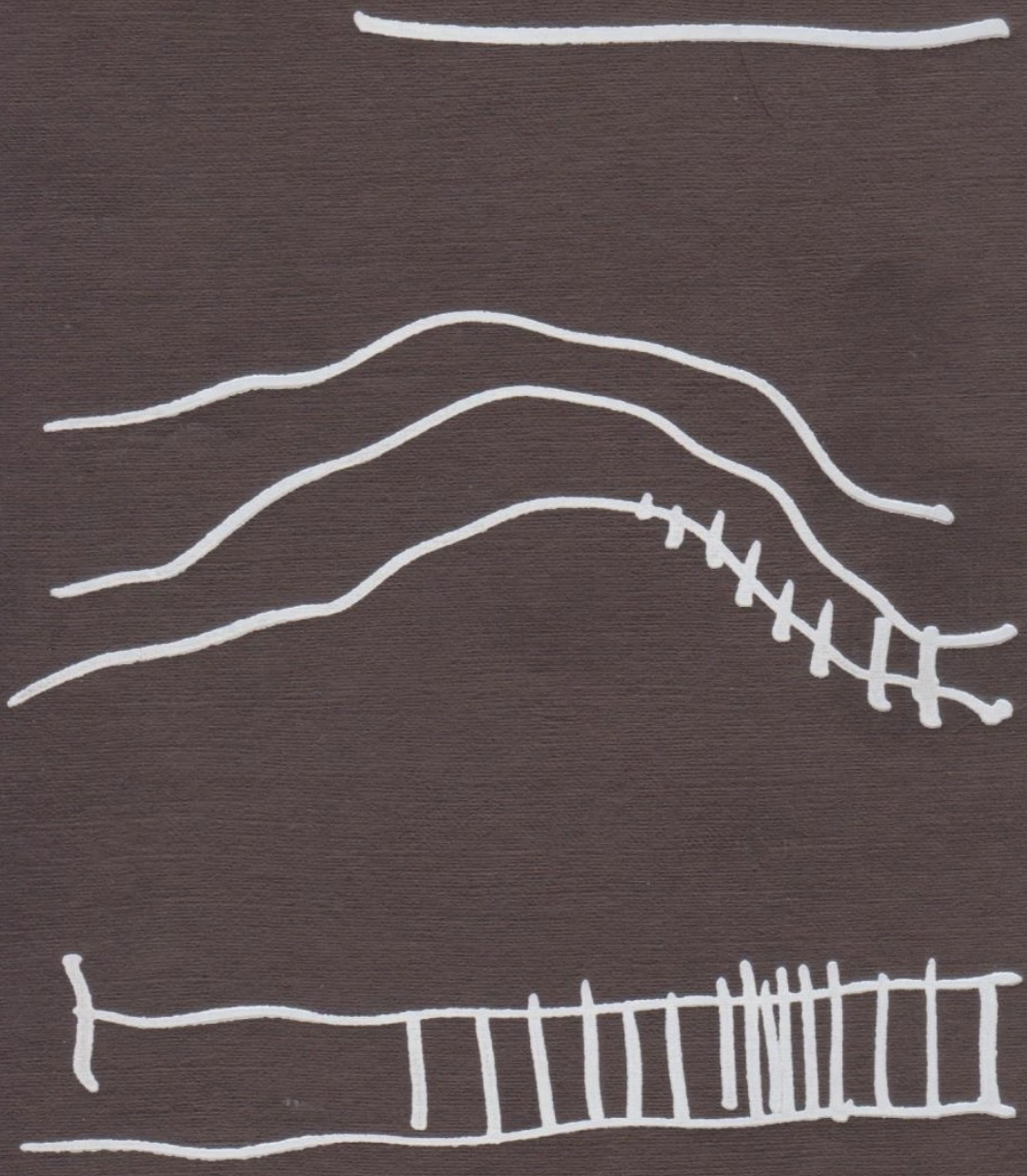


THE POWER OF



EXPERIMENT



THE POWER OF

**ARTÉRIA — Humanizing Architecture**

*4<sup>th</sup> Edition of Lisbon Architecture Triennale*

EXPERIMENT



EDITORS

ALBERTO ALTÉS  
ANA JARA  
LUCINDA CORREIA

CONTRIBUTORS

ALBERTO ALTÉS  
ANA JARA  
ANDRÉ TAVARES  
EIMEAR TYNAN  
GRO RØDNE  
HENRIKA PIHLAJANIEMI  
JOÃO SOARES  
JANIKE KAMPEVOLD LARSEN  
JOHANNA GULLBERG  
JOSÉ CAPELA  
LARS LERUP  
LEENA KUORELAHTI  
LUCINDA CORREIA  
TIMO LEIVISKÄ  
TONI ÖSTERLUND



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# by JOÃO SOARES

Master in Architecture and PhD in Architecture  
UNIVERSIDADE DE ÉVORA / PORTUGAL

Key Concepts, Collaborative Tools, Instructions, What

# TRY THINKING LIKE A TREE

TO COLLECT, MEANS ALSO: TO VARIATION (AND RECURRENCES); TO BUILD A "MAP" OF AVAILABLE MATERIALS. IT IS INHERENT A HIGHLY INCLUSIVE APPROACH WHICH COULD BE UNDERSTOOD FROM THE SUGGESTION OF "A CERTAIN CHIMBÉ CYCLOPEDIA", A FIGMENT OF BORGES'S IMAGINATION, QUOTED BY MICHEL FOUCAULT IN THE INTRODUCTION OF *LES MOTS ET LES CHOSES*:"

## TO COLLECT IMPLIES A TASK

Four notions to be presented in sequence, and the order of the sequence matters: the subsequent notion is fed the suggestion of the former. Thus, in the end, the former will be reconsidered in the light of the following three, in an elliptical structure.

This was what I had brought with me to share, in the beginning, when entering a game I had accepted on a 'blind-date-like' experience.

This synthetic hypothesis can be summed up as follows:

*Les Mots et les Choses*  
by Michel Foucault  
London: Pantheon  
1966  
First translated into  
English and published  
by Jonathan Cape  
in 1970.



by SARAH BRADY  
THINKING  
LIKE  
A TREE



img. 60

Four notions to be presented in sequence, and the order of the sequence matters: the subsequent notion is fed the suggestion of the former. Thus, in the end, the notion will be reconsidered in the light of the following three, in an elliptical structure.

This was what I had brought with me to state, in the beginning, when entering a game I had accepted on a 'blind-date-like' experience.

This synthetic hypothesis can be summed up as follows:



Key Concepts: Collections Tools Instructions Walks

## COLLECTIONS

TO COLLECT, AS AN ACTION,  
MEANS ALSO: TO IDENTIFY  
VARIATIONS  
(AND RECURRENCES);

TO BUILD A "MAP" OF AVAILABLE  
MATERIALS. IT IS INHERENT A HIGHLY  
INCLUSIVE APPROACH, AS COULD  
BE UNDERSTOOD  
FROM THE SUGGESTION OF  
"A CERTAIN CHINESE ENCYCLOPEDIA",  
A FIGMENT OF JORGE LUÍS BORGES'S  
IMAGINATION, QUOTED BY MICHEL  
FOUCAULT IN THE INTRODUCTION  
OF *LES MOTS ET LES CHOSES*<sup>[1]</sup>:

TO COLLECT IMPLIES A TASK  
OF ORGANIZING THE  
COLLECTED MATERIAL  
IN A LOGIC CAPABLE OF  
DE-CODIFYING THE WORLD.

[1]. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* is a 1966 book translated into English and published by Pantheon Books in 1970.



Key Concepts: Collections Tools Instructions Walks

## TOOLS

BEING INEVITABLE TO DEAL WITH THE NOTION OF INSTRUMENTS (BEING IT CONCEPTUAL OR TANGIBLE), TOOLS HERE ARE CONSIDERED AS THE WORKING TABLE (OR WALL) OF THE USUAL WORKING SPACE — MY OWN TOOLS, THE ONES I WORK WITH, AND/OR THAT I BRING WITH ME ALWAYS... THE IDEA OF THE SET OF TOOLS AND THE VERY WAY THEY ARE DISPLAYED AS PART OF MY OWN WORK (AS IN BRANCUSI'S WORK).

IN A SITUATION OF DISLOCATION — — AS HAPPENS IN WORKSHOPS LIKE THE PRESENT ONE — THE REFLECTION ON THE RELEVANCE OF WORKING WITH ITS OWN TOOLS, OR THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF USING THEM, PRESENTS ITSELF AS PERTINENT.



INSTRUCTIONS  
TO REPEAT PROCEDURES TO  
VERIFY THEIR VALIDITY, BUT ALSO TO  
TRY DIFFERENT PROCEDURES, TO TRY  
OTHER WAYS, TO WORK WITH THE  
POSSIBILITY OF



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FAILING ITS  
POTENTIAL AS IN  
SAMUEL JOHNSON'S  
TRIED, EVEN BETTER, TRY  
AGAIN, FAIL AGAIN, FAIL BETTER.  
THE VERY EXISTENCE  
OF INSTRUCTIONS ALLOWS THE  
POSSIBILITY OF TRANSGRESSION.



Key Concepts: Collection, Logic, Invention, Walls

# TOOLS

BEING INEVITABLE TO DEAL WITH THE NOTION OF INSTRUMENTS (BEING IT CONCEPTUAL OR TANGIBLE), TOOLS HERE ARE CONSIDERED AS THE WORKING TABLE (OR WALL) OF THE USUAL WORKING SPACE — MY OWN TOOLS,

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BRANCUSI'S WORK). IN A SITUATION OF DISLOCATION — AS HAPPENS IN WORKSHOPS LIKE THE PRESENT ONE — THE REFLECTION ON THE RELEVANCE OF WORKING WITH ITS OWN TOOLS, OR THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF USING THEM, PRESENTS ITSELF AS PERTINENT.



**INSTRUCTIONS**  
TO REPEAT PROCEDURES TO  
VERIFY THEIR VALIDITY, BUT ALSO TO  
TRY DIFFERENT PROCEDURES, TO TRY  
OTHER WAYS. TO WORK WITH THE  
POSSIBILITY OF  
FAILURE, CONSIDERING ITS  
POTENTIAL RICHNESS, AS IN  
SAMUEL BECKETT'S INSISTENCE 'EVER  
TRIED. EVER FAILED. NO MATTER. TRY  
AGAIN. FAIL AGAIN. FAIL BETTER'.  
THE VERY EXISTENCE  
OF INSTRUCTIONS ALLOWS THE  
POSSIBILITY OF TRANSGRESSION.



# WALKS

TO WALK AS A MEANS  
OF LEARNING, LIKE IN THE  
PERIPATETIC TRADITION.

Key Concepts: Collections Tools Instructions Walks

TO WALK MEANS ALWAYS  
TO DEAL WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF  
SERENDIPITY — 'THE FACULTY OF  
MAKING HAPPY AND UNEXPECTED  
DISCOVERIES BY ACCIDENT' (1754  
HORACE WALPOLE). TO WALK  
AS A MEANS OF ACQUIRING  
(CRITICAL) DISTANCE  
OVER THINGS.





img\_63



***reCollections* (picking up from the beginning): Also connected with the idea of display, of presenting and exhibiting something (the objects and the criteria underlying the order of the display).**

## Beginning

Four days; four lunches; 'quindim' snacks; cookies with green tea cream; orange juice and coffee; mayonnaise; canned white beans and codfish; water. Ingredients managed by the experienced hands of the chef that guided the breaks for mind and body, leaving digestion to do its important process in reflection.

Workshops always promise good treats...

If we add a garden, a small water tank with red fish, the mild temperature of early autumn and the joy of experiencing the disinhibition of bodies in the waking hours of the morning, rehearsing choreographies performed by Clara Andermatt, mixed up with the scent of pine sawdust, the excitement provided by machines and instruments for bricolage... such a workshop was promising and suggested the will to try.

This could be the beginning to the story of the days spent *formulating, formalising, performing* — searching for ways to look at *the form of forms*, trying to understand their process.

But let us begin with matter.

## Wood

I always felt great affinity for carpenters, who work with wood. I have built this kind of private theory that carpenters are gentle souls, perhaps because they deal with wood, a matter with a sweet, delicate, and vivid, gentle touch. Certainly this idea is strengthened by the figure of Joseph, the carpenter who fathered Jesus Christ, or the less erudite figure of Heidi's grandfather, in the famous Johanna Spyri's story from the late 19th century. Carpenters are represented as big men, sturdy as trees, kind and protective. As if in therapy, working with wood fosters a relation-



ship of hands passing over the node and the core, on the shafts, looking for directions and shape... searching to understand matter.

Of course much of this idea is more a confabulation than reality, because, with the exception of joinery — which would be the present-day equivalent to the *haute couture* of carpentry (using a common wood like pine) — carpentry deals less and less with the material in its natural state and, more and more with composite, processed materials, with performances different from those of natural, eventually less whimsical materials. It uses fewer fittings and more glues and screws to attach the parts.

I should therefore adapt my sensual perception of the universe of wood, updating it however towards something similar.

But the virtues of a material simultaneously elastic and coherent remain mainly intact — a classic! One can build an entire house in wood, equipping it with wood furniture and even with everyday utensils in wood. The rustic image of the lumberjack hut comes to mind; the image sustains itself.

So, ever since the beginning, and via a pre-conceived image, I associated that noble material with the idea of a workshop that stresses experience as its motto.

It would end up becoming true, in fact. Since day one the place where we would spend a whole week together harboured a discreet pile of wood logs, boxes with screws, and a few small wireless drills at the entrance. One could also find two support tables with electrical wood saws used to make particular cuts or joints.

## The experience of the direct

This was where one started from, disciplined by the triad Formulate, Formalise, Perform.

In this triple motto, in a well-defined interval of time, the challenge led to something seductive: to direct experience. This means finding oneself implied in the effort of direct communication — to speak and to write directly — to think directly. Also — not always, nor necessarily, but often — to know how to let go of a common culture of reference (understood as a legacy of shared meaning, without any need for footnote references) — and to be able to find oneself in a situation of *tabula rasa* (in which one starts again and again), where gestures are repeated (and,



thus, also errors...).

It seems to me that these contingencies — little time and little sophistication — are the qualities capable of producing freshness in formulated answers.

This way one experienced everything, from elementary combinations, configuration triangles or choreographed boxes, to more complex articulations of sawn wood willing to be tree trunk again, in an attempt to learn its intelligence and to think like a tree, or, finally, to risky relations with doors and windows from other time and places. The warm-up exercises proposed by choreographer Clara Andermatt had the capacity to evince precisely the inherent qualities of the *direct*, of experimenting 'without a net': the thrill of questioning the body planted the will to search for the best way to express the self.

The — I would call it handy nature of the workshop does not necessarily obliterate the dimension of acquired knowledge, of the so-called state of the art on tackled subjects; it thrusts towards a direct mode, which works as a continuous 'first time' in which the only prior references would be those inherent to one's body.

## Starting again — starting always as it were anew

This continuing restarting happens not to build an evolution capable of producing refinement and sophistication, but — and precisely because of that — to be in contact with the freshness of finding solutions 'for the first time'. The interpretation one could draw from Sisyphus would then not be that of a progressive improvement, imbedded in Beckett's motto, but that of a work on oblivion which would allow to (re)encounter the enthusiasm that comes from the expectation of climbing the mountain, and looking for effective ways to push the rock upwards; the re-creation of a state of ignorance, a state of emptiness of knowledge to be filled by the knowledge brought by experience as it happens.

What would be the reason for Sisyphus? — To come back again, always, putting oneself in a condition of availability for the mountain, for the experience of climbing — indifferent in the beginning to the meaning of reaching the top.



Therefore, it would not so much be about learning a technique, or its rudiments, from the perspective of mastering it to apply it — but rather about learning the value of the experience and its intensity. These values would serve to trigger the desire for technical mastery as a way to express the self, an aspect that is the foundation for learning.

And yet, it would not be so much about learning through an empathic process of ‘proximity’, since that would also require time. The time for the body to learn through gestures, to embody them.

The days of the workshop — few, though intense — would be about understanding the importance of ‘doing’.

We could then already schedule the meeting for the next workshop!

## Towards an intelligence of the hands

Just a final word on the crossing of different educational cultures, assuming the possibility of a common denominator suggested in the alleged Portuguese affinities with the Scandinavian universe.

Rather than operating a reading, or a survey of the differences and similarities of the exceptional and recurring aspects, the value (or the power!) of this blend is that it allows to directly confront models and teaching paradigms. Rather than looking for the design of a good and effective model, I am more interested in the coexistence of different models, and in the possibility of trying changes of registers. It will be a test to the elasticity of students as much as to that of mentors’. But I progressively believe that the most successful schools are those that operate *transmodels* (different, though in a simultaneous common space), and not those that search for an identity in univocal links to teaching models.