

## THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS – HISTORICAL PRODUCTION, PHOTOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION AND THE SENSE OF PLACE IN PORTO'S OLD CITY

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### Resumo

O artigo aqui apresentado é parte de uma investigação mais abrangente que, partindo de uma antropologia de inspiração fenomenológica, visava identificar e analisar as diferentes conceptualizações que diferentes grupos sociais têm da parte antiga da cidade do Porto e ver como esta área urbana joga um papel na construção de um sentido de pertença ao Porto, ele próprio. Apresenta-se aqui a construção desse sentido do lugar como objectificada pela prática fotográfica e respectivos sistemas representacionais de dois universos específicos: os serviços de turismo da Câmara Municipal e os habitantes do Porto antigo.

### Abstract

The paper presented here is part of a wider research project that, departing from a phenomenological informed anthropology, aimed at identifying the different constructs that different social groups have of Porto's old part, and to see how this urban area plays a role in the construction of a sense of belongingness to Porto. The referred to analysis of a construction of a sense of place is presented in this paper through the practice of photography and respective representational systems of two groups: the city council tourism services and inhabitants of old Porto.

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Alice had had quite a long argument with her sister only the day before – all because Alice had begun with 'Let's pretend we're kings and queens;' and her sister, who liked being very exact, had argued that they couldn't, because there were only two of them, and Alice had been reduced at last to say, 'Well, YOU can be one of them then, and I'LL be all the rest.'

Lewis Carrol

*Through the Looking-Glass – And What Alice Found There*

### 1. Producing a Sense of Place

Porto is located on the western Portuguese Atlantic coast at the centre of the second biggest Portuguese metropolitan area encompassing eight other cities making up c.12% of the Portuguese population.<sup>1</sup> The old part of Porto includes a UNESCO nominated World Heritage Site, an area of c 90 hectares where c 13 000 people have their home.<sup>2</sup>

This urban place is a dense space: overpopulated until recently, its urban grid still maintains some of the medieval layout on which eighteenth and nineteenth century interventions left strong marks. Until the 1800s Porto was a town that lived facing the river and its docks: this riverside area of Porto was the place where the very heart of the city's economic and social life pulsated, a place where the wealthy (mainly bourgeois) families had their town houses, a place where the two main driving powers of the city's life and history- the Catholic Church and the city council – also had their homes. The beginnings of the nineteenth century seem to witness a series of situations, such as cholera and bubonic plague epidemics, that started to erode the importance and attractiveness of this riverside area: the narrow streets and their poor sanitary conditions together with the high population density of the area made it easy for

<sup>1</sup> The data referred to is prior to 2005. In January 2005 five other cities (Arouca, Santa Maria da Feira, Santo Tirso, S João da Madeira and Trofa) joined the Porto Metropolitan Area (Espinho, Gondomar, Matosinhos, Maia, Porto, Póvoa de Varzim, Valongo, Vila do Conde e Vila Nova de Gaia) now named Porto Greater Metropolitan Area. Neither the National Institute for Statistics (INE) or the Porto Greater Metropolitan Area web site supply updated statistics for this new territorial unit.

<sup>2</sup> According to the 2001 census, the total of inhabitants within the four civil parishes (*freguesias*) that constitute the World Heritage Site (Miragaia, S Nicolau, Sé and Vitória) is of 13.218 people.

diseases to spread and produce a high death toll. Those who could, i. e., the wealthy families, escaped these diseases and the contagious living conditions of the riverside area and went to live in the upper parts of Porto. Those who couldn't, i. e., the poor, stayed. Ever since then the old part of Porto has functioned as one of the entranceways into the city, a place where those arriving in the city in search of a better life could easily find, if not a house, at least a room or a bed to rent. This area of Porto has been the object of an urban rehabilitation process since 1974, and more recently also of social development programs. This urban area is identified as the birthplace of the present day city and hence old Porto being a place, an urbanscape that is at the core of a complex interplay between different social groups as to what the city as a whole and its inhabitants are about. Old Porto is a place where Porto's multivocal identity is being most visibly negotiated, constructed, contested and heralded.

Although the name of a city may remain constant, its physical and emotional structure constantly evolves. In a city's materiality lie buried its memories, a vehicle for the past to be carried forward to the lived present and the desired future. The word 'materiality' is used here because, although the wider research focus was on the material world, the study was not a material culture study as such, at least not in the form it assumed from the 1980s onwards.<sup>3</sup> According to Tilley (1990: vii), material culture studies aim to explore in a systematic manner the linkage between the constitution of social reality and material-culture production and use. As Miller states, the generality of materiality must be complemented by a strategy that looks to the specificity of material domains and the way form itself is employed to become the fabric of cultural worlds (1998:6). In this particular study this stance is seen as objectified in the concept of a 'sense of place' taken as a cultural process (activities, practices and imaginations) through which places are rendered meaningful and multidimensional, the complex ways in which places anchor lives in social formations (Feld and Basso 1996:7). According to Miller, material culture studies have constructed in academia specific areas of study (food, buildings, clothing and so forth) that take as axiomatic the particular character of their domain. However, these

<sup>3</sup> For a description of this area's development within academic studies see Miller (1998).

areas do not perceive themselves as part of a larger study of material culture neglecting the ways each particular domain might add up to the larger generality of difference (Miller 1998:7). By taking a liberal (or unshackled) view of material culture as an academic subject the wider research of which this paper is part of, aimed at moving to the delineation and understanding of the 'larger generality of difference' as produced in relation to old Porto. In this particular case, materiality encompasses a specific area of a city – old Porto – and the narratives that constitute this area's sense of place.

A city image is complex and multi-layered (Lynch 1996:46; Gottediener, Collins and Dickens 1999:68). According to Casey 'to live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in. (...) Perception at the primary level [is] synesthetic – an affair of the whole body, sensing and moving' (1996:18). Moreover, things and places come already configured and the configuration is already meaningful: 'The sensory is senseful (...) perception [is] never entirely a matter of what Kant calls 'receptivity' ' (Casey 1996:18).<sup>4</sup> According to Lynch (1996), the perception of the city by the knowing subject is not sustained, but partial, fragmentary and mixed with other concerns, a process in which nearly every sense is in operation, with the city image being the composite of them all. Lynch writes with a city's inhabitants in mind, but his use of the concept 'legibility'<sup>5</sup> is equally applicable to city visitors. 'Legibility' implies that the city is not seen as a thing in itself, but is perceived by people. In the early 1970s imageability was then seen as determined by visual differentiation combined with significant social or behavioural associations (the role of the symbolic meaning of space). It was recognised that individuals and groups can and do impose their own meaning upon urban space (Gold 1980:99).

<sup>4</sup> Although the wider research carried out did pay attention to the centrality of the human body in the experientiation of place as registered in relation to old Porto, this paper deals with it only marginally. Although it is a well known fact that the traditional five senses work in cooperation and not in an isolated form (Rodaway 1994), by centring on the photographic representation of the place this analysis reflects a particular form through which the place is experienced and the sense of place is produced, one that is mediated by the sense of sight.

<sup>5</sup> 'By this we mean the ease with which its parts can be recognized and can be organized into a coherent pattern (...) a legible city would be one whose districts or landmarks or pathways are easily identifiable and are easily grouped into an over-all pattern' (Lynch 1996:2/3).

According to Lynch the image of a place and its degree of legibility and imageability varies from individual to individual as people are differentially culture-laden and time-space contextualised beings.

Environmental images are the result of a two-way process between the observer and his environment. The environment suggests distinctions and relations, and the observer – with great adaptability and in the light of his own purposes – selects, organizes, and endows with meaning what he sees. (...) Each individual creates and bears his own image, but there seems to be substantial agreement among members of the same group.<sup>6</sup>

(Lynch 1996:6/7)

If to perceive synesthetically is to be actively passive, it is to be absorptive and constitutive both at once, it is also to be constituted by cultural and social structures and practices sedimented in the deepest levels of perception. Not only do these structures and practices permeate every level of perception but the permeation also occurs especially when a given perception is preconceptual and prediscursive.

To be not yet articulated in concept or word is not to be nonculturally constituted, much less free from social constraints. (...) The primacy of perception is ultimately a primacy of the lived body – a body that (...) is a creature of habitual cultural and social processes.<sup>7</sup>

(Casey 1996:19)

Thus, culturally produced images and widely disseminated senses of place contribute significantly to this preconceptual and prediscursive perception of a place.

As already stated, the paper presented here is part of a wider research project that aimed at identifying the different images that different social groups have of this specific part of the city and to see how this urban area plays a role in the construction of a sense of

<sup>6</sup> Though Lynch's concern is basically with the effects of physical, perceptible objects he states '[t]hat there are other influences on imageability, such as the social meaning of an area, its function, its history, or even its name' (Lynch 1996:46). For an importance of the names given to places and their social significance see Pred (1990).

<sup>7</sup> This stance that underlines the importance of both not only discursive but also praxis-orientated cultural knowledge is common to several authors, including Giddens (1984) with his concept of 'practical consciousness', Bourdieu (1977) with the concept of '*habitus*' and Connerton (1989) with social memory seen as embodied and performative.

belongingness to Porto.<sup>8</sup> Starting with a brief analysis of the historians representation of Porto, this paper will then move into analysing two particular representations on old Porto – the city council tourism services and the local inhabitants' – as objectified in one materiality: the photograph. The aim is to show how the same material world can hold more than one reality, thus underlying the ontologically diverse nature of space.

## 2. Producing a collective self

All social groups have agents that act as producers of culture, constituting important forces in the construction of a sense of a distinctive, orthodox, collective self (Featherstone 1997). In order to pursue the wider research objectives a triangulation of approaches to cultural producers', local inhabitants' and tourists' apprehensions of the city was carried out. The following cultural productions were analysed:

- (i) the work of University of Porto historians on the city
- (ii) novels and chronicles that had Porto as the main setting for the action narrated
- (iii) films where the city of Porto is not only the setting of the action but can be said to assume the role of a character
- (iv) the tourist information supplied both by international guidebooks and by the city council

Concerning the construction of a sense of place by old Porto inhabitants themselves, the research strategy implied observation and participation in their daily lives, the collection of both biographical narratives and of stories on the place and the use of photography as a means of registering the local inhabitants' 'important places'. Tourists and the way they experience old Porto was also part of the research carried out with routes taken, places visited and sights photographed used as privileged chronotopes of analysis.

<sup>8</sup> Doctoral dissertation in anthropology: *Porto's Historic Centre and the Materiality of Belonging* (University College London – UK 2004). Research funded by Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia – Programa Praxis XXI- Bolsas de Formação Avançada financiada pelos POCTI -Forma e Qualificar – Medida 1.1

There is a close relationship between the tourism-based representation of Porto and that of the historians. The relevance of the professional historians' discourse in the way Porto is represented is most certainly related to its status as 'scientific truth'. *História do Porto* edited in 2000 by Oliveira Ramos, a historian of Porto University, was the main source for the analysis on the present day professional historians' discourse on the city. *História do Porto* is a work produced by academics but not for academics. Its audience are people that in some way have an above average interest in the history of the city, people who wish to in one thoroughly informed stroke behold the main landmarks of Porto's life. The luxurious binding of the book as well as the profusely illustrated text bear witness to this type of readership. This is a history book that has proved popular with readers: there have been three editions in six years. This feature, i. e., its wide consumption, together with its 'state of the art' status were the main factors that contributed to its choice as an analysis unit for the research.<sup>9</sup> The Faculty of Letters of Porto University (FLUP) has a well-reputed History research group. FLUP's historians are strongly influenced by the *Annales* school sharing with their French counterparts some of their features, namely the importance of the regional monograph and personal identification in which one does research:<sup>10</sup> the historians writing in *História do Porto* work largely on Porto-related themes.<sup>11</sup>

One of the features shared by all of the cultural productions analysed within the wider research – exception made for the tourist international guidebooks –, namely literary texts and filmic production, is that they were all produced by Portuguese who, if not Porto-born, had almost all developed a strong relationship with the city along their biographical paths. Another marking characteristic of most of the works analysed is

<sup>9</sup> The first edition dates from 1994. A revised edition published in the year 2000 notes that the UNESCO nomination was a significant drive for publishing a third edition. This edition also benefited from the marketing opportunities created by Porto's status as European Capital of Culture in 2001. To note that the publishers offered special purchase deals to secondary school teachers, thus further enabling this historical narrative to achieve a wide circulation.

<sup>10</sup> These two characteristics of French *Annales* historians' work are described by Burke (1989). Ramos states that the reasons behind the promoting of the study of Porto, 'the city where we live and where our ancestors also circulated', are related both to the present relationship of Portugal with Europe, and to the authors own life paths (Ramos 2000:9).

<sup>11</sup> Porto and its surrounding regions (including the port wine producing region in the upper Douro) constitute the 'region' to which these historians have mostly dedicated their research.

the fact that their public is also mainly Portuguese – again, exception made for the tourist international guidebooks –, with none ever reaching an international visibility beyond, if at all, small circles of specialised knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. 'The Very Old, Noble, Loyal and Never Defeated Town'<sup>13</sup>

The physical (architectural) presence in the present of past times is a determinant feature of Porto's old centre. The historicity of this urban area is the main value played by the Municipality, the tourist trade and increasingly by its own inhabitants. The World Heritage Status accorded by UNESCO in 1996 is a consequence of and a prime mover for such process. This is an urban area that is actively writing a narrative of selfhood through an explicit use of History.<sup>14</sup> According to Cohen (1989) the manner in which the past is invoked is strongly indicative of the kind of circumstances that makes such past-reference salient.

As a whole, the Porto's professional historians' discourse as exemplified by *História do Porto*, can be seen as structured on two fundamental points of argument which are closely intertwined

- (1) to assert the seminal contributions made by Porto to the life and the very existence of Portugal as a nation, both in political and economic terms.
- (2) to assert the specificity of Porto's inhabitants' character throughout the Ages

<sup>12</sup> International guidebooks are completely different in this particular aspect since they circulate an image of the city of Porto that not only is it produced mostly by non-indigenous cultural producers, but moreover, even in the cases where the producer is Portuguese, it is mostly produced for non-Portoans, i.e., it is produced for people who do not know Porto and come to visit the city: the tourist (both national and foreign). The guidebooks analysed within the wider research were four: the Portugal-dedicated volumes of *Michelin's – The Green Guide* (Michelin 2001), *Lonely Planet* (Wilkinson and King 2001), *The Rough Guide* (Ellingham, Fisher and Kenyon 2000) and *Le Guide du Routard* (Gloaguen 2002). These guidebooks were those that the research showed to be the most frequently used by the tourists visiting the city. Such information was obtained through a questionnaire applied in the summer of 2001 to tourists visiting Porto' Tourist Information Offices.

<sup>13</sup> Porto crests of arms' motto.

<sup>14</sup> In Porto's application form to UNESCO there are 95 sites within the Historic Centre listed as 'de interesse patrimonial' (of heritage value) (CRUAR 1996:102).

Another strong characteristic of this discourse can be found in the strategy followed in the prosecution of the above-mentioned purposes in that it is often dependent on a comparison (by opposition) to Lisbon, Portugal's capital for most of its existence as an independent nation.

Concerning the first point we find Porto being portrayed throughout the times as

- (a) a *dynamic entity*: a regional and transnational trading centre able to energise the economy of the nation, and as
- (b) a *symbolic entity* with a marked sacrificial value, a city that was always able to raise to the challenge and give the nation what the nation need the most at whatever point in history

Concerning the second point we find Porto being portrayed throughout the times as

- (a) a *people's republic*: a place where democratic rights were always fought for.

The invoking of Porto's past plays a major role in the social and ideological construct that is 'to be a *tripeiro*', i.e., to be a true inhabitant of Porto. The city and its people are credited with a 'character', a non-physical reality that pervades the spaces that make up the city (its streets, its houses) and of which the lives of Porto's people and particularly of those in the old part are seen as an embodiment of. *Tripeiro* means 'tripe people'. This naming of Porto's inhabitants results from a specific episode in the history of Porto: at the time of the Portuguese maritime expeditions in the fifteenth century the town supplied the ships heading to the African coast with all the food it had. Porto's inhabitants were left with nothing else to eat but the intestines of the animals that supplied the salted beef for the ships. The typical dish of Porto is, still today, tripe. Industrious, strong-willed and forthright, loyal to the nation and champions of freedom, these are the characteristics of the true inhabitants of Porto that are portrayed in a systematic manner by Porto cultural producers, namely historians, both past and present.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The wider research also analysed earlier works on the history of Porto: Castro (1926), Bastos (1938) and Peres and Cruz (1962/65).

The main points that structure *História do Porto's* historians discourse are already visible in the first half of twentieth century historians' production on the city, but it is possible to note a visible shift in the period that is presented by the two sets of historians as the epitome of the city's character and seminal contribution to the life of Portugal as a nation. In the earlier works that period is Medieval Porto of the fourteen century dynastic crisis and of the early maritime voyages of discovery. In Ramos (2000) it is the port wine merchant Porto of the 1800s. If, as Forty and Kückler (2001) argue, the act of forgetting is part and parcel of a larger project of remembering, the distinctive shift in the narrative's focalisation from earlier works on the city to the one present in *História do Porto* presents itself as an important element in the understanding of how Porto represents itself today. If the chapter on Medieval Times is the second longest chapter in Ramos (2000), the truth is that its lines do not portray the same kind of Porto as the earlier works do. What the reader of *História do Porto* gets is not the tales of brave and loyal merchants, but a detailed description of the evolution and functioning of the local government of the city. The main theme is Porto '*the people's republic*' its main focus being the way the local merchants were able to become a powerful political group that ruled Porto during that time. The aim is to set Porto as one of the main players in the construction of the concepts of both 'local government' and of 'citizen/citizenship', two of the fundamental tools in a present day democratic regime. It is interesting to note that the democratic slant to this period of Porto's life is given by contrasting the wealthy merchant's desires against the power of both the Catholic Church and the Nobility. Although the outcome of the historic process is clearly assumed by the author – though only in a few lines – as the setting of a ruling merchant oligarchy (Sousa 2000:208), the narrative reads as 'a fight for democratic rights' because the majority of the city inhabitants (craftsmen and workers)<sup>16</sup> figure little in *História do Porto* (either in this particular period or any other). By 'forgetting' (Forty and Kückler 2001) this social strata and other minorities that helped construct the city's history such as women, blacks, Jews and other

<sup>16</sup> According to data supplied by *História do Porto*, the city in the seventeenth and eighteenth century had only 20% of its population living from the merchant trade (Silva 2000:281). Also 'citizens' were not all the inhabitants. In the eighteenth century only 5 to 7% of the population were such (Silva 2000:322).

groups, Porto historians are able to construct a narrative of a fair, democratic city, one that is still prolonged to the present day.

*História do Porto's* narrative on the city presents another relevant aspect in this constructing of a city memory and identity which is the importance given to the Porto of the 1800s, the longest chapter in the whole of the book. If the higher number of pages of the 1800s' chapter might result mainly from the detailed information made available by the authors for this period (economy, trade fluxes, political events, mentalities, demographics, material culture, etc), it also results from the inclusion in it of an analysis of the late 1700s, period when the port wine production – the trade mark produce of the present day tourist Porto – started to weigh heavily both in Porto's and in the nation's economy. If in fact the length and the detailed information in this chapter might result from better and more abundant sources, one must also ask why is it that this particular period in the history of Porto seems to have so much research devoted to it in the last decade or so. In fact, in this present day construction of a city-image that strongly values the historic, the port wine related studies seem to play a fundamental role, acting as a mechanism of remembering a particular Porto – a merchants' city -, one that the present wants to make part of the city's self image and representation to others, namely tourists.<sup>17</sup>

According to Forty and Kuchler 'social memories are not drawn on some unquestioned mass of empirical facts, rather are the product of a shifting through the confusion of the past for evidence that serves to substantiate existing beliefs' (2001:193). *História do Porto* (Ramos 2000) can then be taken to be both a monument to the city and a tool in the creation of its collective memory and identity. In its 'monument' quality what is worthwhile to note is that like any other memory-laden materiality, its memory value only becomes interesting through its struggles with forgetfulness, making this collective memory representation more meaningful (Forty and Kuchler 2001). The poetics and politics of the History/Heritage discourse on the city are closely associated with the marketing of Porto in the international tourism market, and consequently with the tourist experientiation of Porto. This can be clearly seen through the

tourist information made available both by the international guidebooks and the city council tourism leaflets.

### 3. Guided Through Words

Guidebooks and other tourist information supply the visitor with a cognitive representation of the city that works as a frame for the experientiation of the place.<sup>18</sup> The city council-organized guided tours and its tourists leaflets share a common narrative, which is one of *Porto--as-History*, a result of the close collaboration in the making of the leaflets between the council's tourism services and the Porto University historians.<sup>19</sup> Thus, not only does the presentation of the city follow the general lines of the discourse outlined in the previous section, as this presentation is made through what could be characterized as a 'palaeontologist' informed narrative in which the heuristic value of the fossil is assumed by the 'monument'. The buildings are narrated in terms of their architectural/artistic elements producing an anatomic, and more seldom physiological reading of the space being gazed at: the texts abound in vaulted arches, loggias, domes, portals, rose windows, stucco, gilded carvings, pilasters, etc. The same way the museum visitor is guided from showcase to show case, so is the Porto tourist directed through routes highlighted in the city map, zigzagging from site No1 to No 2, and so on.<sup>20</sup> At each point the visitor can then stop and read the respective information from the leaflet. As in museums, this is a one-voice narrative, a myth-creating meta-narrative whereby the selection of material to be

<sup>18</sup> The analysis of the information on the city's character and history contained in the four international guidebooks already referred to revealed a latter's closeness to the Portuguese cultural producers, namely the historians' discourse on the city and on the *tripeiro* identity. A fact most probably accounted for the fact that most of the guidebooks' sources – as listed in their acknowledgment pages- were, apart from the 'on-the-field experience' of its authors, native sources, namely people working in the Portuguese cities tourism offices.

<sup>19</sup> The city council tourism service has running since 1997 a set of four pedestrian tours to the Historic Centre civil parishes. These tours are a result of a partnership between the city council and the Art History department of Porto's University Faculty of Letters. Historians who took their Masters degree in that department and faculty, guide the tours.

<sup>20</sup> The museum type being considered here is a 'traditional' model, one that mirrors the reality of most European institutions at the first half of the twentieth century (Dias 1996), having endured in many countries well into the mid 1900s.

<sup>17</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the historians' production on the city see Santos (2004).

gazed at does not precede the theoretical formulations, but is compiled in order to consolidate the former (Dias 1996). On assuming the aestheticised historic as the main value, this 'paleontological' narrative turns into what is known as Heritage.

The promotion of the historic as the main value in the construction of the present-day city image can be clearly seen in the fact that the architectural tourist-objects indexed in the tourist information stop in the late 1800s with later architectural styles rendered invisible as if the city had stopped building noteworthy structures after the late 1800s. The past as an exotic country requires the works of the imagination whereby its visitor is momentarily placed in a space-time of difference.<sup>21</sup> Modernism and Modernity with an aesthetic so close to present day lived life does not allow for the construction of an imagination-based historic gaze, and therefore is not made part of tourist-Porto. This aestheticised gaze over the monumental architecture supplied to the tourist renders invisible the less pleasant side of history: exploitation, class struggles, histories of displacement (migration, diasporas), violence, despotism, they are all absent. Heritage is history pleasant to gaze at and nowhere is this more clearly so than in the present day use of the 1700s *Cadeia da Relação* building. This is a former prison that was recently extensively restored and rehabilitated being now the home of the Portuguese Centre of Photography. Local inhabitants' memories of the place reveal a particular relation to that space, a *locus* of institutionalised repression and violence that is underplayed by the official presentation of the place. In the local inhabitants' memories of the place while still a prison, we get both the excitement and the thrill whenever a prisoner escaped and was chased by the police as well as the fear of the massive building inner parts where one could end up in for trifling matters.<sup>22</sup> The former prison building truly epitomises this aestheticised gaze over historic buildings: a

<sup>21</sup> Reworking here Lowenthal's (1985) expression 'the past is a foreign country', thus stressing the appeal of *the exotic* as one of the drives for tourism as a social practice, even when the tourist activity is focused on heritage landscapes (the often called *cultural tourism*) and not on what could be classified as the *traditional exotic* (places inhabited by the 'ex-primitive' (MacCannell 1992), non-western people).

<sup>22</sup> Which is not that far removed in time since it functioned as a prison until the revolution of 1974. Once made vacant, it was occupied by people without a home, some of them Portuguese returning from the former colonies in Africa that had been made homeless by the de-colonization process started in 1974/75. It was made vacant in the mid 80s.

place of repression and violence and a place of suffering is now a place for the exhibition and fruition of the visual gaze *par excellence*: photography.

#### 4. Through the Looking-Glass: photography and the representation of place

Photography is not a unified practice (Evans and Hall 1999) and the significations of the social values therein encapsulated do not merely derive reflectively from the real, being but one aspect of a specific politics of representation and knowledge.

The entire significance of the idea of a politics of representation is that it refuses to regard cultural practices as merely reflective of, and subservient to, other political struggles taking place in the non-textual. The politics of representation are much occupied with questions of alignment and identification, with points of view, and perspectives.

(Watney 1986:187)

Representation is a practice closely tied up with both identity and knowledge, being an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged through the use of materialities that stand for or represent things. Photos, as material objects, encapsulate memories insofar as there is always an imperative that deems it worth of photographing any given reality and not another, a decision materialized by the pressing of the finger on the camera's button. Because the research departed of such an understanding of photography as a social practice and of the photograph as an object that a corpora of photographic representation of old Porto was collected and analysed as a way of objectifying in a materiality the different gazes cast over the same place.<sup>23</sup>

Because photographic systems are systems of controlled visibilities (and invisibilities), the photographic corpora here presented will be taken

<sup>23</sup> The photographic corpora collected encompasses four gazes over Porto: the illustrated postcard's, the tourist's, the city council's and the local inhabitants' gazes. This paper will only present the latter two.

as a form of discourse and be made to show how the same medium, photography, can actually result from different relations to place and be differentially used by its makers who choose to represent this urban area in very diverse ways, thus producing different 'knowledges' on old Porto.<sup>24</sup>

The discursive approach (...) examines not only how language and representation produce meaning, but how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces connects with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practised and studied.

(Hall 1997a:6)

#### 4.1. The City Council and the Local Inhabitants Gazes

The city council's photos are of single-memory places,<sup>25</sup> contrasting with the inhabitants' photographs where most places are multi-memory places (**Fig 1**).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> It is a matter of realising 'how different technologies of viewing, comprising the material instruments, their ideologies and the comportment and disposition of the viewers, create economies of truth and knowledge which go on to become distinctive, rather than unified, forms of visual consumption' (Crang 1999:245).

<sup>25</sup> Single-memory places: places that are usually narrated as connected to just one event, one particular point of the past. Single memory-places are very frequent within the city council representation of the city (*Porto-as-history*) whereby a place/monument is made relate to a particular moment within the history of the city, and thus of the nation.

<sup>26</sup> Local inhabitants' photographs were collected after over a year of fieldwork. I asked people with whom I had developed a closer relationship – and thus of whom I had sufficient complementary information to help contextualise the photos to be taken – to photograph places of importance in the old part. I stressed that a place could be very many things, but took care however in not overtly specify what could be seen as 'a place', in order to try and avoid directing/conditioning the action. The people who took part in this collection (four males: youngest 38 years old- oldest 49 years old; five females: youngest 25 years old-oldest 50 years old) were aware of the nature of my interest in the old part of the city. Each person took an average of nine photos; this number resulted from an estimate of what could be a sufficient number of photographs/places and the need to control costs by sharing a disposable camera between three inhabitants. Conversations on the photographs taken (what was being photographed and why) were then held with the inhabitants/photographers. The information supplied in figure 1 and 2 resulted from the analysis of the tapes of those conversations.

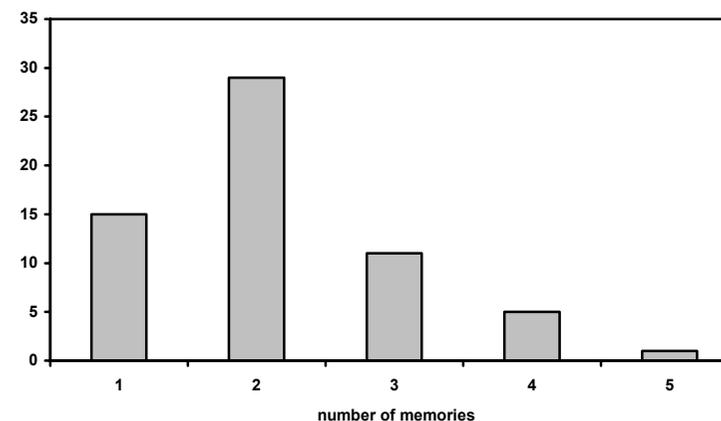


Fig 1 Local Inhabitants Photographs –number of memories per photograph

The memories related to the official photographs are usually related to the history of the city and of the nation, while the inhabitants' photographs displayed a marked presence of community life memories (**Fig 2**).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> The categories presented were created by me after listening to the tapes of the conversations. If this paper focuses mainly on the objectification of the visual experientiation of the city, the conversations held with the local inhabitants over the photographs taken were able to reveal the multi-sensed dimension of the experientiation and belongingness to place as expressed in the opening of this paper. Not only were the places loci of several memories, as these were often expressed through realities that were not photographable, such as smells, sounds and flavours. It should also be added that the strength of the recalling of past times was stronger when mediated through those other senses and not through sight (a strength translated into the emotion disclosed and the difficulty of expressing into to words a realm of human experientiation that does not lend itself well to discursive expression as visual impressions/information does).

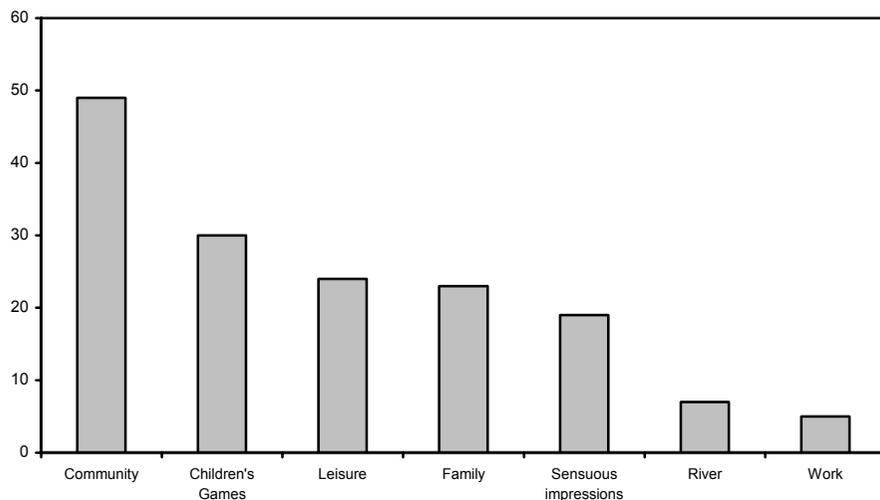


Fig 2 Local Inhabitants' Photographs -type of memories

If the representation of the city made by the professional historians' production can be argued to assume the form of Heritage where the aestheticised narrative of the white 'heroic male' (Aitchinson 1999) is the dominant theme, then the city council's system of photographic representation of old Porto can be said to help consolidating such a production of knowledge (Fig 3).

Not only the categories most represented in the city council system of photographic representation are of individual buildings of monumental nature (*Public Buildings; Churches*), but also the recording of *Architectural Detail* as the third most frequent category reinforces the value of the 'aesthetic' as one of the primordial values of this city representation.<sup>28</sup> However, if the photographic corpus of old Porto as produced by the city council tourist information reinforces the already presented historians' sense of place, it also adds new elements to it.

<sup>28</sup> The *Architectural Details* part of this city council system of representation, unlike those part of the inhabitants' system of representation, are selected through their aesthetic quality while the inhabitants' were so due to their personal biography legibility.

The materiality of old Porto as represented in the city council tourism information photographs depicts mostly single buildings and rarely *Urban Units*, the latter displaying a strong presence in the local inhabitants' photographs (Fig 4).

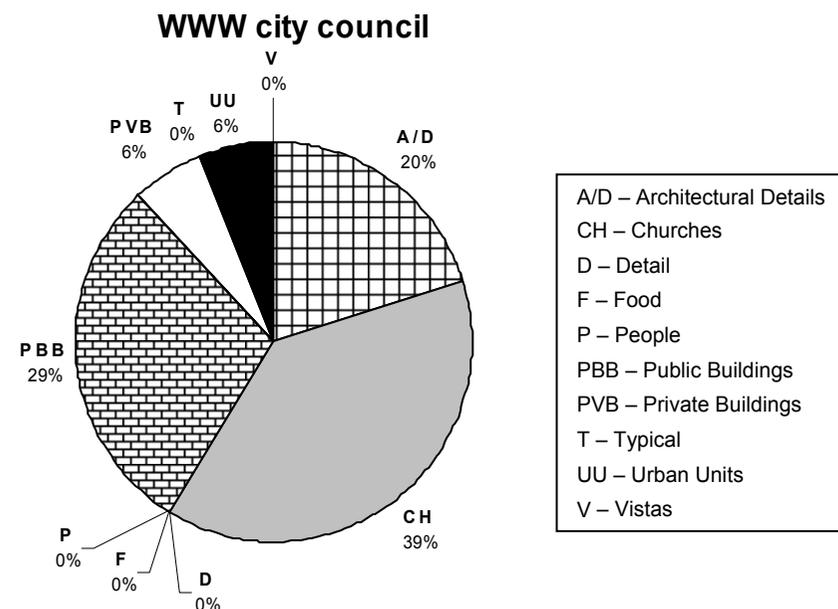


Fig 3 City Council photographic corpus – distribution of the type of motifs photographed\*

\* Again, the categories were constructed by me, resulting from a visual analysis of the images. *Architectural Details* – such as a door, window or any decorative motif which is part of a wider unit; *Churches* – religious buildings; *Detail* – of non-architectural nature; sometimes a visual element that puzzles or amuses its beholder; *Food* – usually to be consumed by the photographer; *People* – of some relation to the photographer in the case of the inhabitants or tourists; as human figures in the city council and the illustrated post cards systems of representation (tourists and illustrated postcards systems of photographic representation are not presented in this paper). *Public Buildings* – usually, but not always, of monumental nature harbouring public functions (museums, courts, schools, etc); *Private Buildings* – of residential nature; *Typical* – portraying the exotic/Other through 'traditional' activities (for example, street vendor); *Urban Units* – such as squares, streets, communal washing tanks, etc; *Vistas* – implies visual command from a vantage point over a wide section of the land/urbanscape.

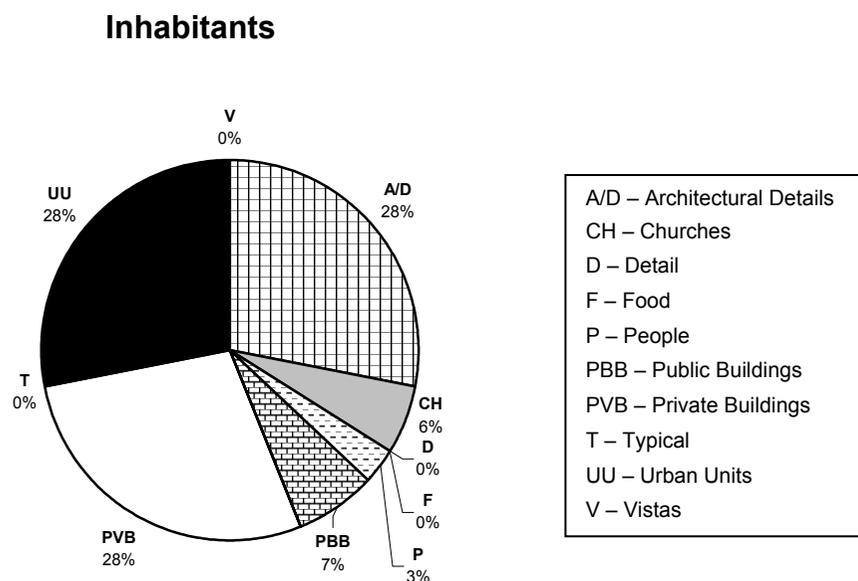


Fig 4 Inhabitants photographic corpus – distribution of the type of motifs photographed

Since in old Porto the street is a lived space that mingles the borders of private and public space, the strong presence of the category *Urban Units* in the inhabitants' photos is taken here as connected with the importance local inhabitants' discourse and daily lives accord to community and family life in their construction of an old Porto sense of place.<sup>29</sup> The absence of the *Urban Units* category in the city council photographic system of representation renders invisible the present day complexity of the lived city. This present day modernity is also negated by the careful framing of the photographed objects whereby adjacent 'modern' buildings, cars and people are edited out.

While the inhabitants' photographs are not very marked by the institutional systems of photographic production since they were both produced on demand and by people with little training and experience of

<sup>29</sup> The importance of these two elements in local inhabitants discourse on old Porto was collected mainly through their biographical narratives, their histories of the place and through participant observation of their daily lives.

photographing, the photos part of the city council system of representation require particular attention concerning its system of production since they were made by professional photographers, and the latter exert more control over the photographic subjects (Emmison and Smith 2000:41). Within this particular set of photographs, more than to insert them in descriptive categories of production (artistic, documental, etc), it is important not to lose sight of the specific power institutions possess in order to define and organise the rhetoric of photography, i. e., its production and the control of its uses, exhibition reproduction and evaluation (Watney:1986), thus establishing a Foucauldian 'regime of truth'. Within this context it is worth noting the presence of the category *People* in the local inhabitants' photographs as relevant elements, part of old Porto. The city council's depiction of place devoid of people is an important element in this heritage/tourism-based system of representation having been referred to by Dann (1996) in his study of British public targeted summer holiday brochures. The invisibility, and therefore non-existence of people within the city council's system of representation of old Porto is seen here related to not only a 'empty place' ready to be appropriated by its visitor, but as a 'regime of truth' where the historic is turned into heritage, thus becoming a body without time (timeless), though never ahistoric. This stripping of time out of the heritage body also produces the naturalization of this system of representation, because *nature* as primordial essence is also without time.<sup>30</sup>

Within this system of representation Porto is a city made of monumental fragments of history, a series of architectural bodies disembodied of the city itself, a representation that is strengthened by the rhetoric of the image, i. e., the way form is manipulated in order to persuade. Most of the buildings photographed are not only monumental in nature as they are photographed whole (full length), 'face on' (the façade), in the centre of the picture and quite frequently along a vertical axis orientated from bottom to top creating a subjective sense of the object, one that enhances the monumental scale of the building producing a sense of respectful distance between the viewer and the viewed, mirroring what Bourdieu describes in peasants' photographs as *the taste for the hieratic* where

<sup>30</sup> *Nature* used here as 'primordial essence', as the first given from where *culture(s)* will then be historically constructed.

deference takes on the essence of centrality (Bourdieu 1965:116/119) (Fig 5).

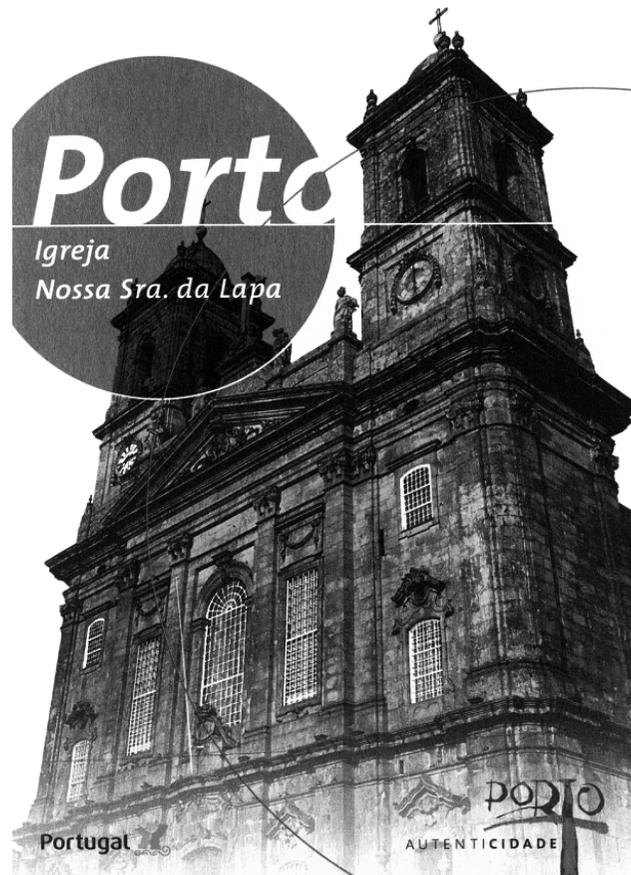


Fig 5 City Council Photograph (N S da Lapa Church)

Old Porto as photographed by local inhabitants is not portrayed as a Heritage place. The heritage bodies when part of the local inhabitants visual representation of the place are thus in the quality of personal biography legibility and are usually photographed without the deference and monumentality than marks the official photographic gaze (Fig 6). There is not a History place. Although not unfamiliar and quite frequently proud of the historic value of the place they feel themselves as belonging to, to old Porto inhabitants old Porto is a place of intimate memories, the space-time of a culture of relatedness (Carsten 2000).



Fig 6 Inhabitant Photograph (the Cathedral's loggia)

The biographical narratives of old Porto inhabitants, although individual, tell a story of community life, something made particularly clear through the set of photographs taken by local people. The main characteristics of this narrative are the extreme hardship of past times and a present day nostalgia for an Edenic past, one marked by solidarity

and where community values were upheld.<sup>31</sup> The narratives provided by old Porto inhabitants supplied immense information on past times and comparatively little on the present, functioning as a resource in creating a continuity of that past into the present at a time when the area was under continuous intervention from outside (namely the urban rehabilitation and social development programmes undertaken by the institutionalised powers). The local inhabitants' narratives with their portrayal of hardship and community solidarity are not only a vehicle for a critique of the state (Mitchell 2002) but also a form of (re)producing their social identity through a discourse on (their) lived place and so state their claim over that same place's future. This claim is strengthened through the assertion of unity making attachment to locality a powerful political resource that because it is portrayed through a *structural nostalgia* (Herzfeld 1997) creates a means of manipulating the intrusions of the state.<sup>32</sup>

Old Porto as 'Historic Centre' has been singularised in two ways: architecturally and socially. Any map is a cognitive representation of a space, but the cartographic representations of a city made to be used by those who visit it are most obviously so. They must supply spatial information that will work as the basis for deciding upon and implementing any strategy of spatial behaviour, namely information on the phenomena's location and attributes (Downs and Stea 1973; Gold 1980). All the city maps supplied by the local tourist information offices printed after 1998 and those printed in tourist guidebooks' recent editions (*Lonely Planet*, *Rough Guide*, *Michelin*, etc) display a cartographic representation of the city where the geography of Porto's heritage is always clearly outlined: a continuous line encircles old Porto as the World Heritage Site separating it from the surrounding city; with in it several *topoi* are highlighted by numbers indexing to the visitor the worthwhile city to see. The old part is

<sup>31</sup> The use of the word community here is not meant to encompass the whole of the old part as a single homogenous unit. The scale underlying the word *community* is always viewed and defined by the narrator/old Porto inhabitant. If any characteristic can definitely be attributed to this concept (*community*) as lived by old Porto inhabitants, it is its shifting and fragmentary conceptualisation (depending on time/space coordinates).

<sup>32</sup> Herzfeld (1997:109) uses the expression 'structural nostalgia' to mean a collective representation of a static image of an unspoiled and irrecoverable past, an Edenic order in which the balanced perfection of social relations made state intervention unnecessary for the conduct of a decent social life.

not only cartographically singularised in these sources: it is also visually singularised.

One of the main characteristics of the representational system of Porto is the production of the intrinsic historic quality and deep time embeddedness of this specific urban area which is made parallel to a sociological singularity of those inhabiting the area. Not only are the houses and streets seen and conceptualised as different from the rest of the city, as the people living in the old part are, themselves, also seen and conceptualised as different from other Porto inhabitants. If the old part is the locus where history can objectively retrace Porto's genesis, i. e., it is 'the place where the city was born', it is also there that one is supposed to be able to find the true spirit of being Portoan in the embodied lives of those who inhabit it, as the flooding of the old part's streets by other Porto inhabitants and tourists during the city's festivities in June (the celebrations of St John) clearly show.<sup>33</sup> It is argued here that the historic singularisation of the old part is consubstantiated in *Heritage* (the Historic Centre) and that of its inhabitants in *Tradition* (the truest of all *tripeiros*).

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to analyse how different forms of belongingness to old Porto express themselves through the material world, a process taken here as closely associated to the construction of a 'sense of place'. The photographic corpora on old Porto was here presented as a materiality symbolically encoded, i. e., a representation whereby meaning is not made reside in the material world in itself, but is constructed through symbolic practices that depend on a relationship between a sign and a concept which is fixed by a code (Hall 1997b).

<sup>33</sup> Old Porto, as the birthplace of the present day city, is also the place where St John's festivities are reputed to be the best, i. e., more traditional, thus more authentic: the festivities have been celebrated there for longer than in any other part of the town and by people who are taken to epitomise the very spirit of the city, the residents of old Porto. The issue is not so much the form. Other areas of Porto might put up a similar sort of show: live music, decorative street lighting, sardines, etc. The issue is the true spirit of it, one that is taken as embedded in the people and the place – the centuries-old narrow streets and houses, derelict homes for a low-income, ageing population – a space that intertwines with a social fabric creating what is reputed to be a particular world within Porto itself.

Meaning is then assumed as relational. Meaning floats never being possible to be finally fixed. However, attempting to fix one out of a variety of existing meanings is the work of representational practice (Hall 1997b:228). And this struggle between an univocality and a multivocality of the material world, in this case, of space as human place, is what the opening quote of Lewis Carroll's presents to us. For Alice's sister there is no doubt that she can only be one person, i. e., her materiality (the body) cannot but hold in one subject, while the wise Alice accepts as logical that she can be any number of subjects that she should choose to be. The difficulty with the study of the practice of photography (the medium here used) as a representational system lies not only on its nature as medium more than an unified practice, but also on photography's deceptively representational nature of the materiality being produced, i. e., the photograph, since the latter creates the optical illusion of capturing reality *as it really is*.<sup>34</sup> According to Hall (1997a:9), issues of representation can only be properly analysed in relation to the actual concrete forms that meaning assumes, in the concrete practices of signifying, 'reading' and interpretation requiring the analysis of the actual material forms in which symbolic meaning is circulated.

Heritage at whatever level (universal, national, regional) is a representational system because heritage is mainly an exercise in interpretation, it is an action of 'value giving' intimately related to the social group's self-perception and representation and its situated agency, something clearly mirrored by the photographic corpora on old Porto briefly analysed here. From here stems the need to accept the inevitable ontological dissonance of the concept of heritage (Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge 2000). Heritage dissonance implies the acceptance of the patrimonial subject as inhabited by uncertainty, complexity and contestation of its meaning throughout time but mostly within a single time. Places must be understood not as singular points but as constellations produced by social relations that intersect places in multiple ways producing multiple meanings. It is perhaps necessary to move from an exclusionary conceptualisation and management of heritage into the acceptance of heritage's multivocality and the active promotion of reciprocity of esteem

<sup>34</sup> On this particular issue of the relationship of the photograph (object) with the photographed (world) see both Sontag (1979) and Barthes (2000) who have dwelt extensively on this matter.

of the multiple visions of all the imagined places made live in the same space by the communities who see themselves as related to that same space. The diversity of the gaze cast over old Porto revealed by the photographic corpora collected clearly constitutes it as a landscape,<sup>35</sup> a locality that is differentially read, sensed, lived and imagined by different social groups, by historically contextualised imagined communities (Cohen 1989) that see themselves related to the places that make up old Porto highlighting the diverse ontological nature of human space.

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<sup>35</sup> Landscape in the sense developed by trends within anthropology and geography in the study of human space. For works developing such an approach to humans space see, for instance, Bender (1993), Hirsch and O'Hanlon (1995) and Tilley (1994).

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