

Hashim Sarkis, meanings and unfoldings of a visit to Sao Paulo

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It was as if Hashim Sarkis had brought for his own first expedition to Brazil, in September of 2016, the cyanometer, the same device that Alexandre von Humboldt used in South America in order to measure the grade of the blue of the sky. I mean, the beauty of that old device had captured the attention of Hashim, who considers that every building aspires to inject a specific blueness into the world. It makes sense, the image of the cyanometer opens the publication of his works.

For Humboldt, in the late 17th century, that was a scientific device intending to be accurate informing his portrait of nature later published as the first among the five compiled volumes of his *Cosmos* [1845-1962].

For locals, that same image of the cyanometer, could be taken as a native headdress made by indigenous from blue macaw feathers. Different ways to visually measure the sky: choosing among scales of blues, contrasting against the pure white of the clouds, looking through the trees canopies or observing blue macaws on sky as if flying cyanometers.

For Hashim Sarkis, the beauty of a cyanometer may not to be for grading the blue of the sky in a specific place, but to highlight presence of the sky, represented by the blue color, in anyplace. Thus, for him, the cyanometer instead of a device to differentiate blues, it is a powerful tool to make clear a blue that we share, that unifies people and places apparently dispersed around the world: Beirut, Boston or Sao Paulo.

It is the key he created to open his six architectural operations related, contrasting or as he prefers against the sky: [1] encrusting, Courttower House; [2] delineating, Ballon Landing Park; [3] sheltering, Dayly Mosque; [4] Sequestering, Byblos Town Hall; [5] Coloring, Float; [6] Assabil Public Libray.



Hashim Sarkis and Angelo Bucci at FAUUSP, 2016.

Seventy years before, in 1946, Vilanova Artigas started his trip through United States sponsored by a grant from Guggenheim Foundation¹. Boston and Cambridge were the starting point of his thousands of kilometers long road journey made the Brazilian architect driving a Studebaker. MIT Architecture School was among his priorities to be visited. Two images of that trip are meaningful: a panorama of MIT facing Charles River and himself standing in front his car. Two years later, 1948, Artigas would be part of the founder group of the Architecture School of the University of São Paulo, FAUUSP, and some years after that he designed the new building for that school, inaugurated in 1969. That was the building who host the lecture and exhibition by Hashim Sarkis entitled *The world according to architecture*.

The event of Hashim Sarkis' trip to Sao Paulo was one more clear demonstration of his combined engagement, I mean, with those same three topics — education, practice and theoretical activism — that guided the following interview with him.

Nowadays, an architect could feel that there are just two remain architecture 'styles'. The first one would correspond to a commitment, a kind of resistance aiming to keep the possibility for human life in the future. The second would be the opposite, as a sort of resignation to an unacceptable prediction. But, definitely, this is not the case here, because Hashim is clearly engaged in the first one. As you will see bellow, for him, peace is a mandatory assumption for architecture or any form of expression. Thus, people talking through different fields of dialogue — as education, practice or theory — is an obvious requirement for him, who knows that architecture, as life itself, must be always incomplete, continuously under construction or, as he formulated, as if it was a lesson he carried with him from his trip to Sao Paulo: a great work of architecture knows how to stop one step before, as if keeping it open, as being just a piece to be continued by others. All sheltered by the same blue sky.

1 Wright e Artigas – Duas Viagens; Irigoyen, Adriana; São Paulo, Brasil, 2002