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CHALK CITY: GRAPHIC EXPERIMENTS

JEFERSON CARVALHO DA SILVA

Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, SP, Brazil, 05508-010 –
fla@usp.br

ORCID
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3371-3918>

ABOUT INVENTIONS AND (DIS)ENCOUNTERS

The sun shyly rises through the clouds that cover the seven-thirty in the morning sky. The rhythm of the streets is calm and my steps run along the cement of the sidewalks, molding themselves through the irregular shapes of the stones. I look attentively at the movements of the surroundings, I observe the shop windows, the doors of the stores that are still closed, the posts with their layers of paper and symbols superimposed. For a moment, I look away and my attention lingers on marks on the floor: they are made of chalk and, at first glance, they don't seem to conform to some sort of pattern.

I ask myself: when does ethnographic fieldwork begin and when does it end? Since the first time I found the chalk inscriptions on the sidewalks, walls and street lamps of Viçosa (MG), a kind of “ethnographic instinct” (Peirano 2014) awakened in me. Who had made those marks? For what reason? What did they mean? These were questions that followed me for a long time. At the time, I wasn't developing any specific work, as I would do later, even so, I started to look for such marks in my daily journeys.

According to Ulf Hannerz (2015), it is very likely that ethnographies are the “most characteristic product of anthropological work”. They are contributions through which anthropological theories feed and reinvent themselves from the recombinations of an intellectual nature and the inventive practices adopted by researchers (Peirano 2014). Thus, each ethnography has its singularities, posed by the subjectivities of the anthropologists and by the implications of the contexts that are being observed.

Make ethnography in cities and their spaces lead us, then, to a unique experience of ethnographic and anthropological approaches. Depending on the methods used, it can be one of the ways to approach kaleidoscopic, multiple and polyphonic city compositions. A way of looking at a complex whole in a constant process of transformation, through its micro-actions and micro-resistance that emerges around every corner. It is an invitation to the unexpected, where the raw material operates on the symbolic constellations, at the same time that these imply in its material conceptions. Understanding that: “The city, each city, looks like its creators, who are made by the city” (Silva 2011, XXVI).

When I began to look closely at the chalk marks on the streets of Viçosa, I noticed certain similarities: the graphs were done in such a way that I understood that they were being drawn by the same person. The inscriptions had no right place to appear, they appeared on the floor of the streets, on sidewalks, on poles, on store doors, on walls, on signs and other surfaces. The material was repeated: they were letters, numbers, drawings, words and phrases made in chalk, although I also found various papers with similar marks made with a pen. Not infrequently, I came across supermarket brochures, lottery tickets, book pages and other papers nailed or embedded in poles, trees and trash cans.


I didn't know who left these artifacts and inscriptions around the city, I just fed imaginary suspicions. In a discontinuous, subjective and unexpected cartography, my paths intersected with these narratives, at the same time that they were at odds with those of their creator. Since I didn't know who this person was, everyone could be him.

In this way, I was (ethno)graphically “inventing” (Wagner 2017) someone from the clues that this person left scattered around the city. Clues in a composition as ephemeral and shifting as the traces of those who drew them. Given its processes and its matter, the chalk marks disappeared, became opaque or appeared with force, as if made recently. This unpredictability and the ephemeral character of the chalk marks accentuated our (dis)encounters.

After I saw the chalk marks for the first time, I started to walk around the city with ethnographic experiments in view for the project “Narrating the city: the poetics and politics of everyday life”¹ and started to find new inscriptions with some frequency. During this period, after talking to close friends² about these marks, I received a report from one of them

1. Research carried out between March and September 2019, guided by Prof. Dr. Douglas Mansur da Silva in the Department of Social Sciences of Federal University of Viçosa, to whom I leave my thanks.

2. I would like to thank: Andre Aguiar, my companion on walks and errances, and Matheus Freitas, for his reports about the Chalk Man.



who said that he had seen a man registering them at dusk in front of the City Hall. Here I had my first clue to know who this person might be, this person that marks the city with pieces of chalk, but unfortunately it was the only one. Apart from this report, I got no further information about the apparitions of this man, even though his marks continued to appear in the streets.

My encounters with the “Chalk Man” inscriptions (as I came to call him intimately) lasted months. As they didn’t have a defined frequency or place to appear, I continued with the project’s experiments, letting the marks surprise me. When possible, I registered them with my cell phone or collected some of the papers left by the posts; others I just watched, looking around in the hope that its owner was nearby. The unexpected became one of the elements of fieldwork, the city and the Chalk Man’s expression and creation processes guided me in this unstable map, in a floating cartography.

In a previous work (Silva 2020), where I present the outline of the expansion of the categories of “imprinting” and “moving around”, mobilized by Teresa Caldeira (2012) in your article “Imprinting and moving around: new visibilities and configurations of public space in São Paulo”, I mention these encounters with the Chalk Man. However, their experiences are so undisciplined that they escape any definition. His existence and his creations flee from the attempts to limit thought and order the urban space. These inscriptions reveal, as pointed out by Caldeira (2012, 39), a process of “representation of itself” in which the Chalk Man begins “to dominate its own production of signs”.

If to some extent, in the previous approach, I tried to apply a “disciplined look to see the city” (Uriarte 2013), currently I understand that this look can become somewhat limiting and dominated, as it is just one of the possible ways of observing the dynamics of the city. However, sensitive forms of experience and production of city spaces emerge at every corner, undisciplined, transgressive, deviant like those of the Chalk Man. Observing these forms of expression and existence would lead to what could be methodologically called “undisciplined ways to see the city”, understanding that looking at something or someone is a political action immersed in power dynamics (hooks 2019).

During the time that I lived in Viçosa, I didn’t meet the Chalk Man, I only got close to his marks, his artifacts scattered through the streets, his passage stories inscribed on the stones of the city. Our relationship was built on a cartography of ethnographic (dis)encounters. Therefore, I return to the question posed at the beginning of this text: when does ethnographic fieldwork begin and when does it end? And to it I add others: do our researches only have the duration of the submission of our

works? The time to write articles and monographs? Or do our researches accompany us and start beyond?


I say that because my concerns and this “ethnographic instinct” (Peirano 2014) in relation to the creative processes of the Chalk Man began before the formal beginning of a research, followed its development, its completion, and extended beyond. After I moved from Viçosa, after completing my graduation and finishing the research mentioned above, I had to return to the city to resolve some pending issues. And, precisely on this return, walking through the streets without any greater expectations, I found the Chalk Man inscribing the stones of the sidewalk on which I was passing. I didn’t approach, I watched him for a few moments and continued walking again. I chose this way.

In an “exercise of anthropological fiction” (Viveiros de Castro 2002, 123), I return to this material and these experiences here, using imagination and graphic experiments to approach and present the creation processes of the Chalk Man. Inspired by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2002, 123), the “experience, in this case, is my own [...] and the experiment, a fiction controlled by that experience”. Reporting this now brings me closer to the ways of thinking and inscribing in the city in the ways of the Chalk Man, through his lines and his marks.

Drawing lines on paper, making drawings, can be one of the ways to get closer with the sensitive forms of expression and construction of cities. To enter an imaginary space, a constellation of symbols and materials. As Michael Taussig (2011, 13) points out, “The drawings come across as fragments that are suggestive of a world beyond, a world that does not need to be explicitly recorded and is in fact all the more ‘complete’ because it cannot be completed”. Cities bring us closer to this: they are constructions of the human imagination that are destroyed and reconstructed at every moment; they are mutants and present themselves in a continuous process of creation, in permanent inconstancy and incompleteness.

As mentioned earlier, make ethnography in cities and their spaces lead us to a unique experience of ethnographic and anthropological approaches. Furthermore, make ethnography in cities with graphs and drawings as ways of entering their narratives and forms of expression can be one of the ways of approaching the multiple and kaleidoscopic compositions reworked daily by their inhabitants. Because, “Like the lines of a drawing, the lines of social life manifest histories of becoming in a world that is never complete but always in progress” (Ingold 2015, 317).

A redrawing anthropology, as proposed by Tim Ingold (2015), which takes drawing as a metaphor and methodology, describes and knows



the world through its forms, lines and movements. This anthropology, “graphic anthropology” or “anthropography”, “would aim not at a complete description of what is already there, or has already come to pass, but to join together with persons and other things in the movements of their formation” (Ingold 2015, 319). In this sense, approaching the inscriptions of the Chalk Man, graphically experiencing their ways of thinking and inscribing himself in spaces, I understood and imagined – even incompletely and inconstantly – their mutual experiences of making the city.

The city that is formed through the inscriptions of the Chalk Man, which pulses in his paths, trajectories and marks, is his invention (Wagner 2017). At the same time, the Chalk Man is an invention of the city itself. Meet the Chalk Man, then, is meet the city itself. This one, in turn, also invents me, at the same time that I invent the Chalk Man.

This movement is part of the “anthropological fiction” that is presented here in an attempt to get closer to the “city itself” (Agier 2011). Thus, I understand that the Chalk City – which can be the city of Viçosa, or the cities of Viçosa, which are presented in my or Chalk Man’s lines and drawings – is founded independently of ethnographic (dis)encounters. It pulses in the relations and constellations of matter and symbols that emerge and are imagined at every single time.

ABOUT THE GRAPHIC EXPERIMENTS

According to Fabiana Bruno (2019, 200): “The challenges with images in research in the human sciences, particularly in anthropology, imply rigorous ‘acts’ and ‘movements’ of work: looking, selecting, cutting, reframing, shifting, associating, imagine, assemble and dispose in a way to ‘make see’”.

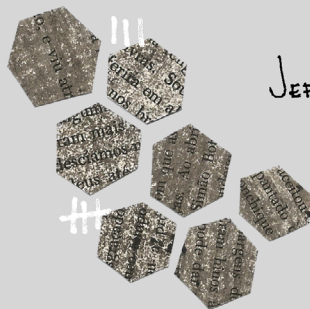
Therefore, inspired by the encounters with the artifacts of the Chalk Man’s creative processes, the graphs (images of various types, inscriptions such as writing, drawing, photography etc) presented here, emerged from experiments in different techniques and forms of composition. Most of them were done manually, from cutouts, paintings with chalk and colored pencils, drawings with pencils and Nanquim pens, on drawing sheets of 140g or tracing paper. After, they were digitized, cut and digitally modified. In this digital editing process, some phrases were added to the composition of the graphic narrative.

The photographs were taken with my own cell phone during everyday walks and erratic experiences. There are also two artifacts with interventions using a ballpoint pen, found in the streets of Viçosa and made by the Chalk Man: the first, a lottery ticket, the second, a loose page from, possibly, a textbook.

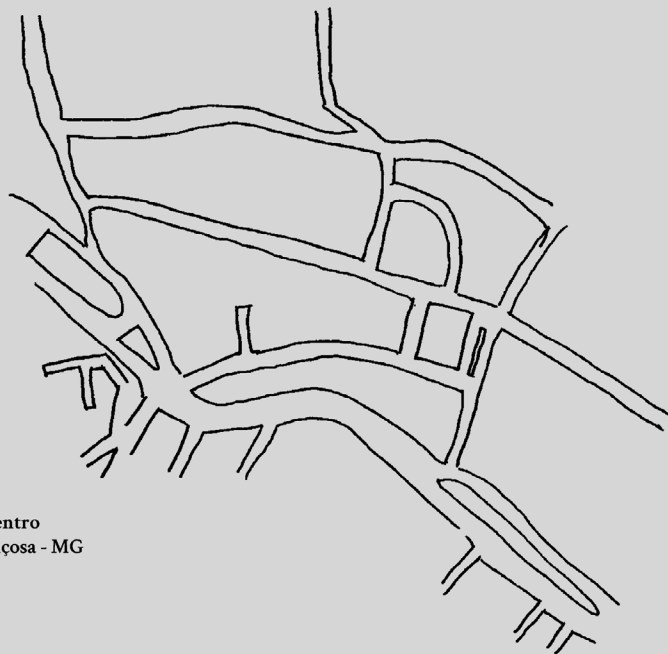
CIDADE DE GIZ

experimentação gráfica e desenhos etnográficos

JEFFERSON CARVALHO



desencontros
em uma
cartografia descontínua



Centro
Viçosa - MG

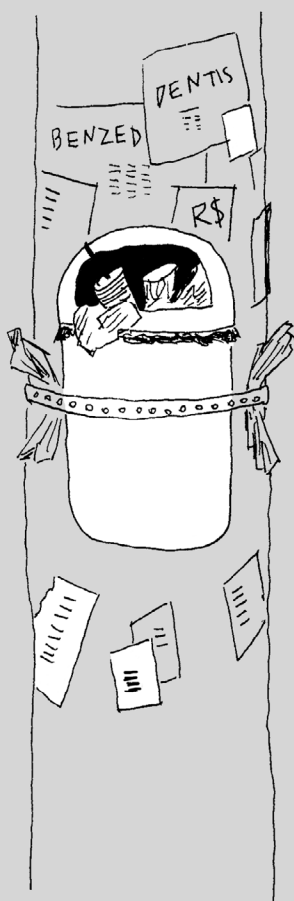
um mapa instável
inconstante



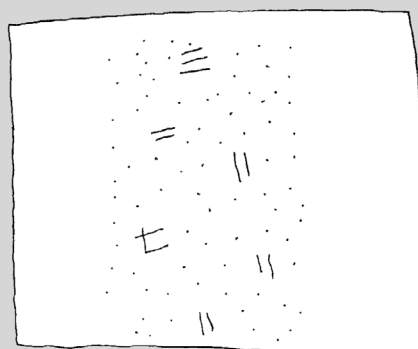
SETE E MEIA
DA MANHÃ



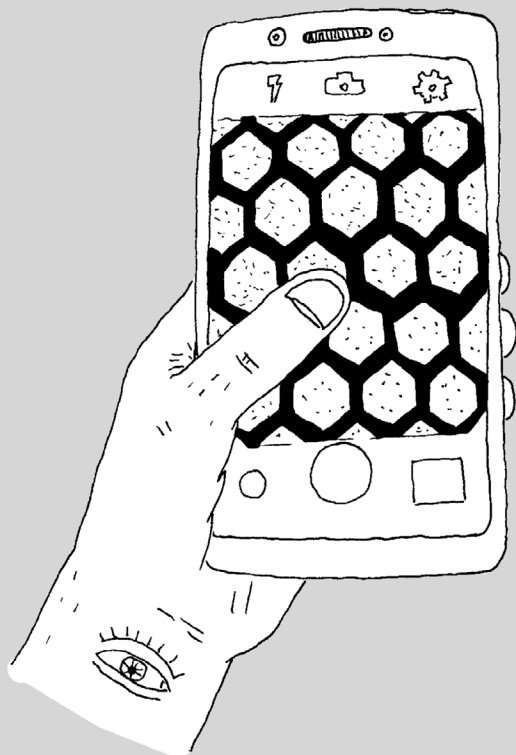
MEUS PASSOS
PERCORREM
O CIMENTO
DAS CALÇADAS



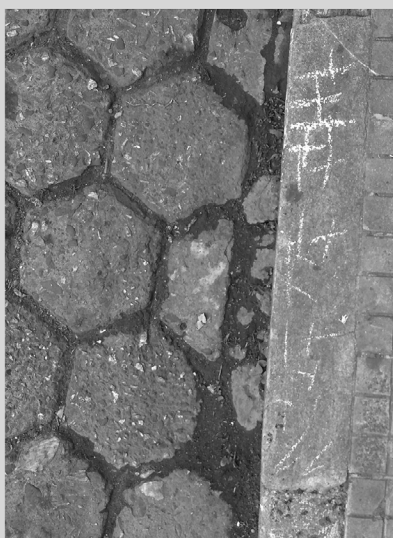
MARCAS
DE GIZ
NO CHÃO



O QUE ELAS
SIGNIFICAM ?



passo a tomar notas
das marcas que encontro

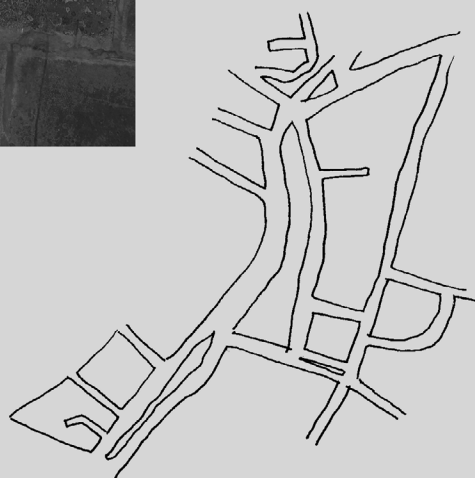


efêmeras



não sei onde e
quando elas podem surgir



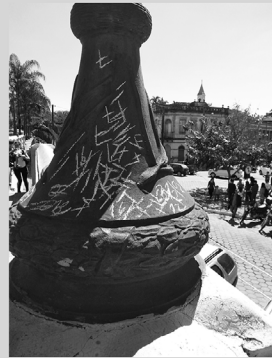


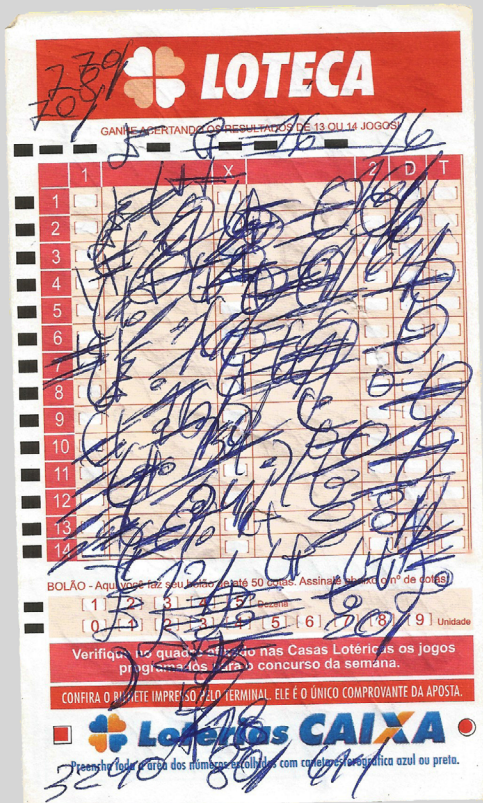
elas se multiplicam,
desaparecem...





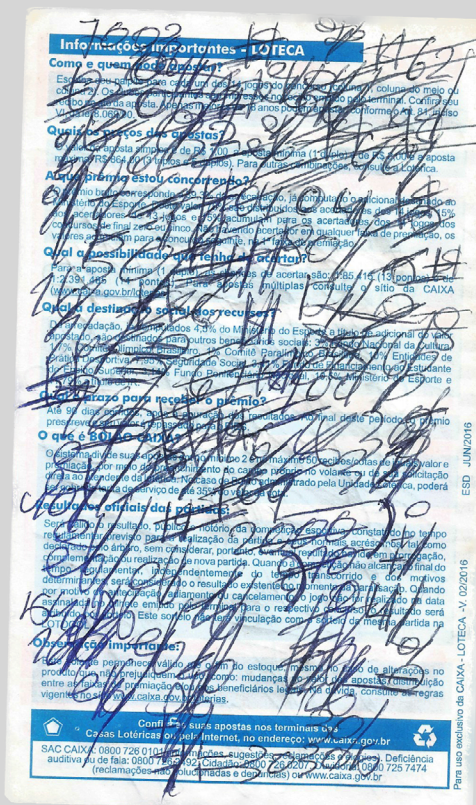
e tornam a
aparecer



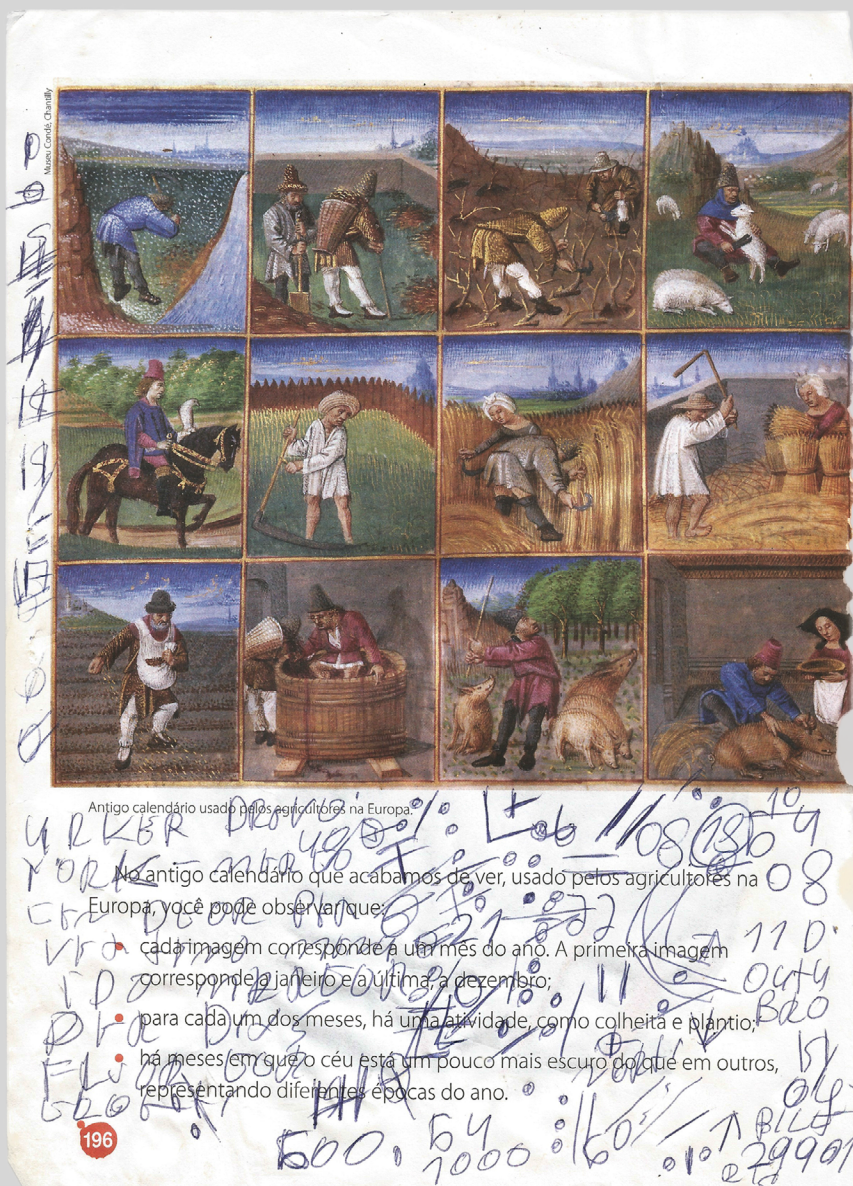


e encontro artefatos espalhados pela cidade

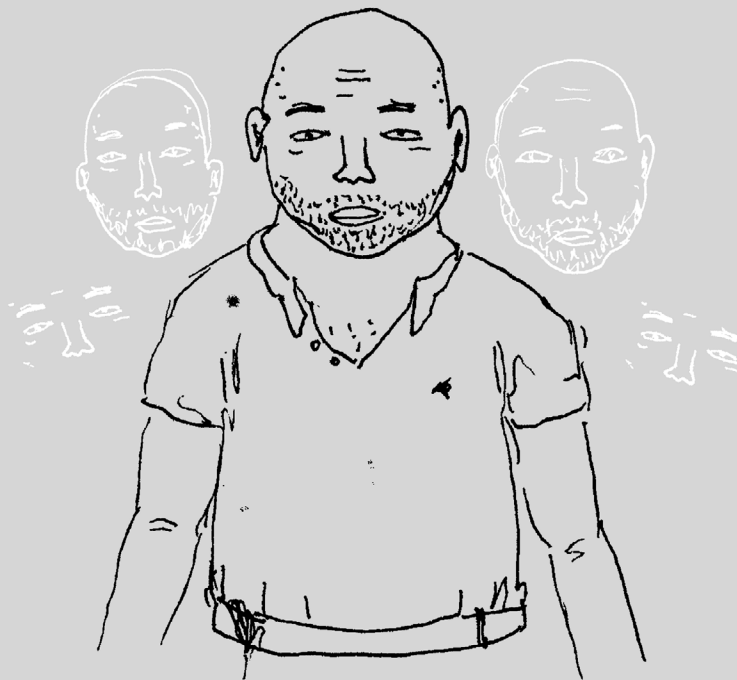
instigado, observo as ruas com atenção redobrada



nos postes, árvores e lixeiras...
em caneta e com grafias semelhantes



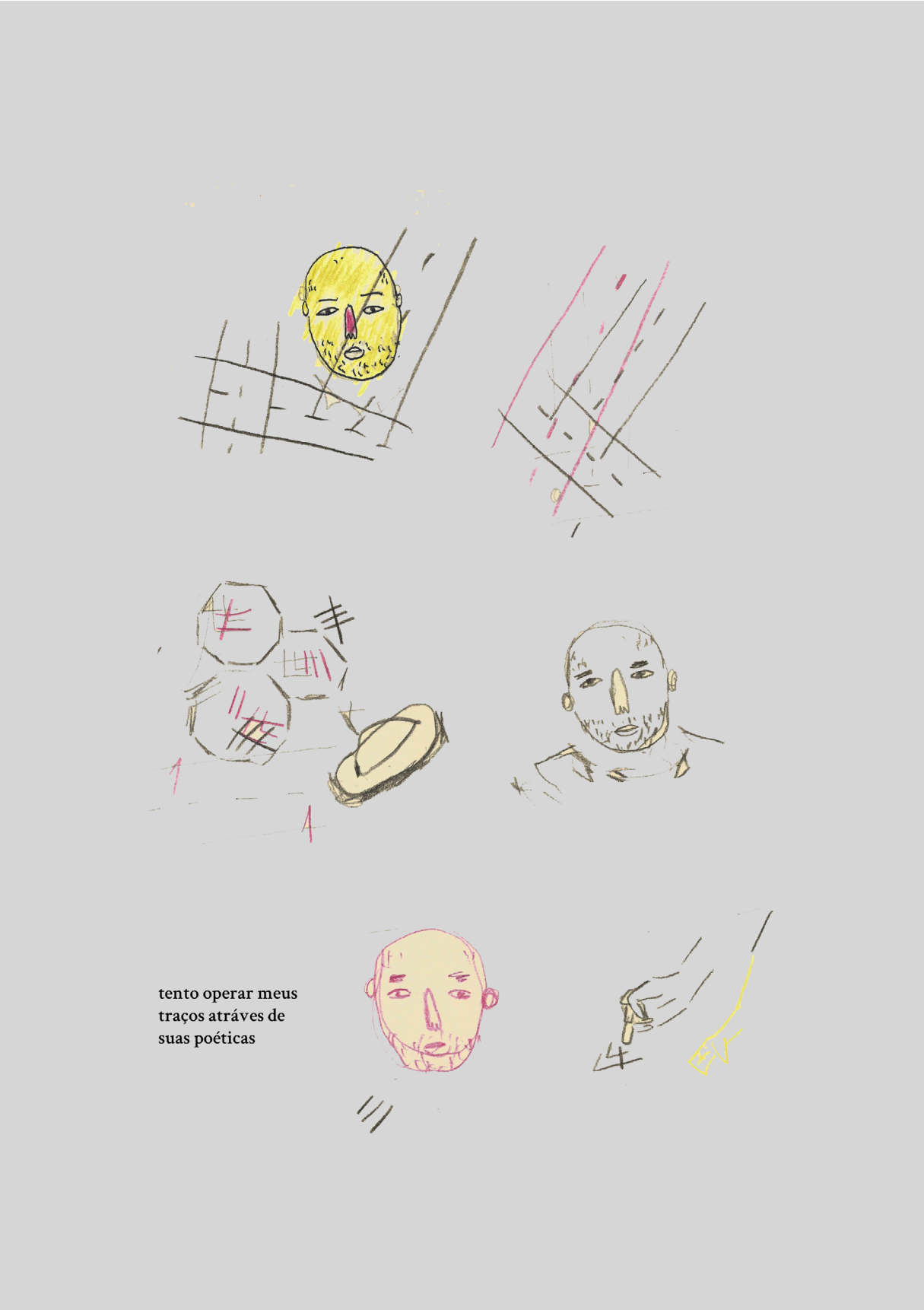
aos poucos entendo que
as grafias são feitas pela
mesma pessoa...



mas quem?

me dizem que um homem negro, de meia idade,
estava inscrevendo as marcas ao entardecer
em frente à Câmara Municipal, no Calçadão

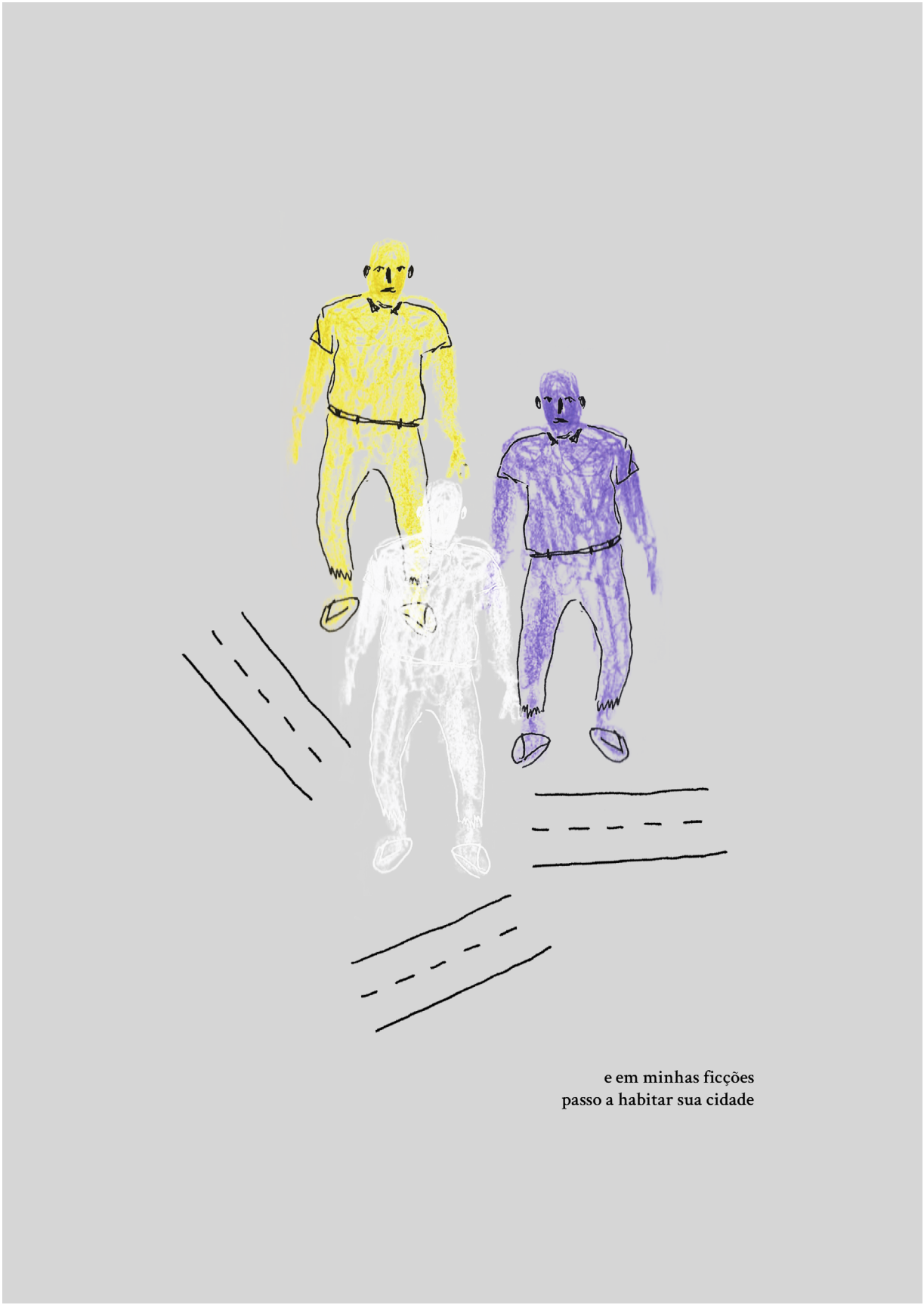
o procuro, em vão...
passo a imaginá-lo



tento operar meus
traços através de
suas poéticas

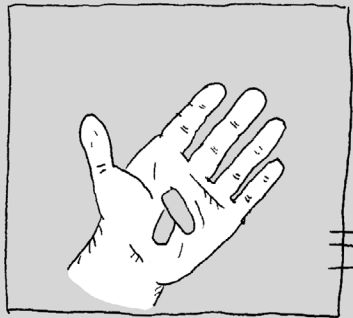


me pergunto:
como inscrever-se
na cidade aos modos
do Homem de Giz?

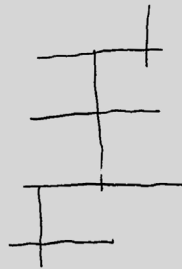
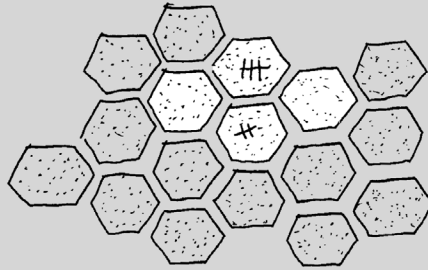


e em minhas ficções
passo a habitar sua cidade

UMA CIDADE
INVENTADA

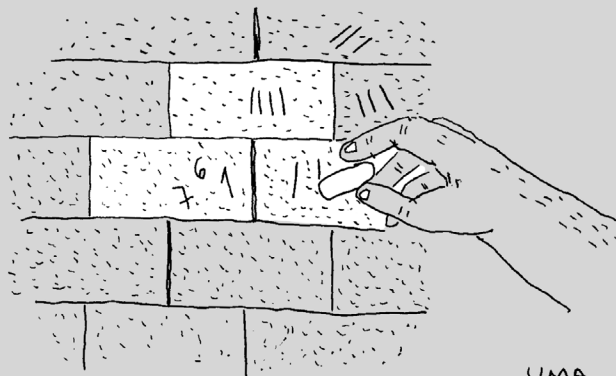
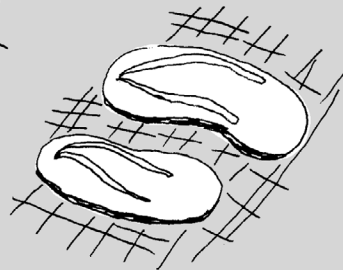


QUE PULSA EM
SEUS CAMINHOS
E GRAFIAS

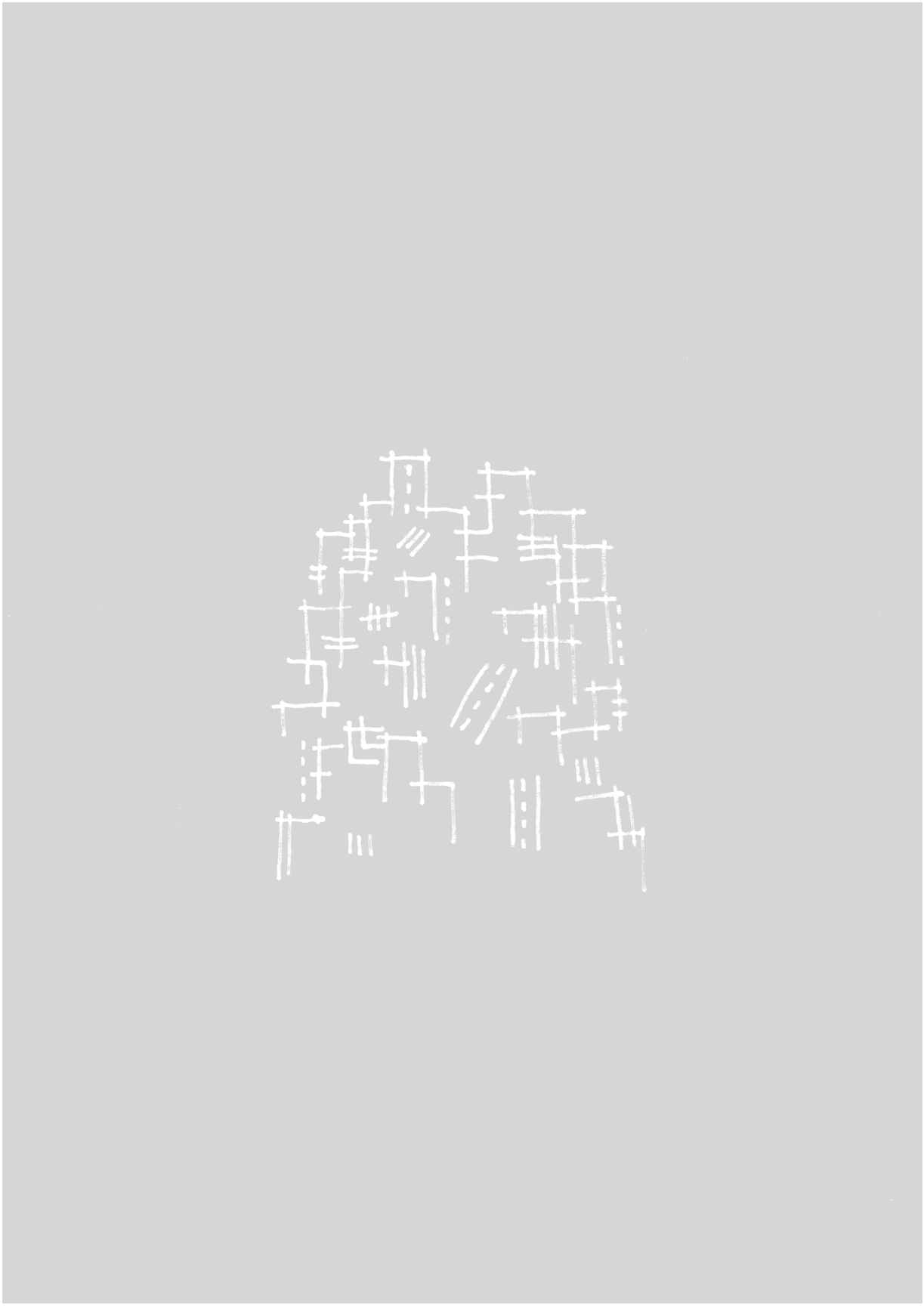


Z O
X

01



UMA CIDADE
DE GIZ



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ABSTRACT

This graphic essay presents the creative processes of invention and occupation of the city produced by one of the inhabitants of Viçosa, Minas Gerais. Following their ephemeral inscriptions, we enter in a discontinuous cartography of ethnographic (dis)encounters, approaching us of spaces constructed and imagined on a daily basis. This experiment is an attempt to think and inscribe in the city on the ways of the Chalk Man, through his drawings and lines. In an “exercise of anthropological fiction”, inspired by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, where drawings and lines become central metaphorically and methodologically, as proposed by Tim Ingold, we get close to an anthropological approach based on the “city itself”, as pointed out by Michel Agier.

KEYWORDS

Graphic
Anthropology;
Drawings; Cities;
Ethnography;
Experimentation.



Jeferson Carvalho da Silva is Master's Student of Social Anthropology at the Universidade de São Paulo (USP), Bachelor of Social Sciences at the Federal Universidade de Viçosa (UFV). Researcher at the Laboratório de Desenho & Antropologia (LABareDA - UFPB) and at the Laboratório Antropológico de Grafia e Imagem (LA'GRIMA - Unicamp). Studies artistic, graphic and visual processes as a form of ethnographic investigation and description. E-mail: jefercarvsilva@gmail.com

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