

# celestial charts

*cartas celestes:*

*cruzamentos . largos . bifurcações*

Electricity Museum, EDP Foundation, Lisbon

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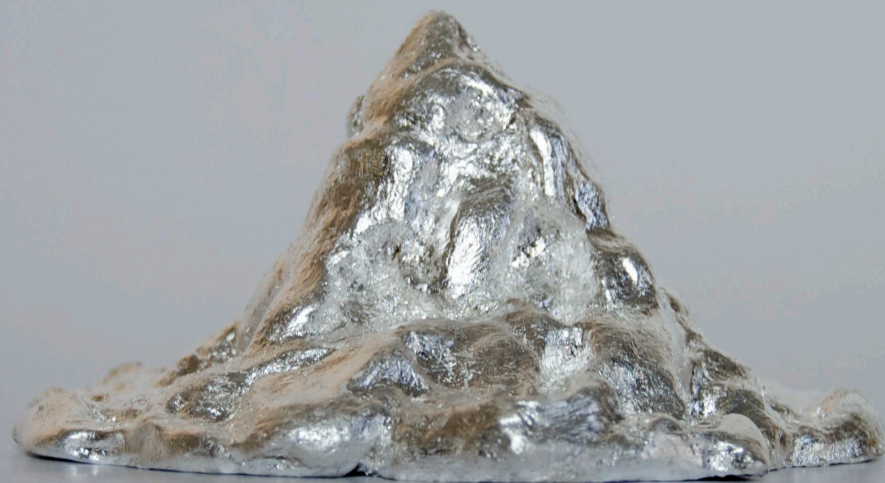
*Speculum* (mirror) gave the name to *speculation*: originally to speculate had the meaning of observing the sky and star movements, with the help of a mirror.

*Sidus* (star) gave also the name to *consideration*, whose etymological meaning is to observe constellations. Those two abstract words have their roots in the study of stars reflected in mirrors.

(...)

What does the mirror reflect?

*Dicionary of Symbols*  
(translated from the portuguese version)  
Jean Chevalier  
Alain Gheerbrandt  
José Olympio Editora, 1982  
6.<sup>a</sup> edition



Untitled, 2012, Fimo polymer clay, acrylic paint and silver leaf, 6 x 11,5 x 12 cm

«Celestial Charts» appear in the context of the project for the Paradise of Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy. After an intense period researching Dantes work, I arrive at an approach of Dante's vision taking into account the classical antiquity, but seeing it from a contemporary point of view.

In a first phase of research I center my interest on a group of images taken from the «Grasslands Observatory», in Tucson E.U.A. At the same time I look other artists' work which have in the past referred to the three phases of the Comedy: Inferno, Purgatory and Paradise, such as Botticelli, William Blake or Gustave Doré.

It is in this phase that important decisions are taken: my approach shouldn't be an illustration of the Comedy, yet more centered in a global vision of the theme and should preserve the universal character of Dantes oeuvre. Important is also to induce the viewer to the influences that characterize modern times, such as globalisation. On the other hand, my approach should bring forth the notion of how these influences appear in a modern society and how globalization brings a determining change in political facts.

Having as prior idea the making of five diptychs, each one corresponding to one continent, the intention is to create a «mirror» of one town per continent. This choice is based on towns from countries in which I live most of my time — Portugal and Germany. As well there are countries from the four other continents I have travelled to in the past or with which I have somehow a personal connection. These are Canberra (Oceania), Kyoto (Asia) - where all the world met for the Kyoto Protocol, New York (Americas); and finally Cape Town (Africa), as it relates to portuguese history when the Cape of Good Hope was rounded in 1488.

## «Mirrored Cities»

*«A mirror is an object that reflects light or sound in a way that preserves much of its original quality prior to its contact with the mirror. Some mirrors also filter out some wavelengths, while preserving other wavelengths in the reflection.»*

*«A star is a massive, luminous ball of plasma held together by gravity. At the end of its lifetime, a star can also contain a proportion of degenerate matter.»*

WIKIPEDIA, *The free Encyclopaedia*

The different «qualities» — or meanings — for the word *mirror* give us here more than one sense of what can be perceived in a mirror. At the same time, the definition for *star* suggests how different stages in a lifetime of a star can result in different kinds of energy. Following this logic, a city that reflects like a mirror, or «*Mirrored City*», should first of all be seen as a metaphor for a notion of evolution and thus, towards movement associated with energy.

What can be seen in a city, no matter where in the world. The word «mirror» in itself induces one to «look into the mirror» and discover what is there to be seen, or better saying, what is there to be reflected.

Charles Baudelaire developed a derived meaning of «Flâneur» — that of a person who walks the city in order to experience it\*. The direction in which I am working in this project assumes here this sort of philosophical trajectory. While creating mirrors from cities, in the sense that a mirror assumes a double meaning of «an object that reflects light or sound», this doesn't tell us which kind of light or sound. Although originally based on Dante's Divine Comedy, my purpose aims to go further: I «need to walk the city in order to experience it» and memorize its sounds and darkneses and lights and waves. And through all this, try to translate it into a visual experience.

\* WIKIPEDIA, *The free Encyclopaedia*

## Paris, «La cité de la lumière»

It is known how the city of Paris was originally designed in a way that each square of the town should have the shape of a star. This image shows a detail of an old plan of Paris where this can easily be noticed.

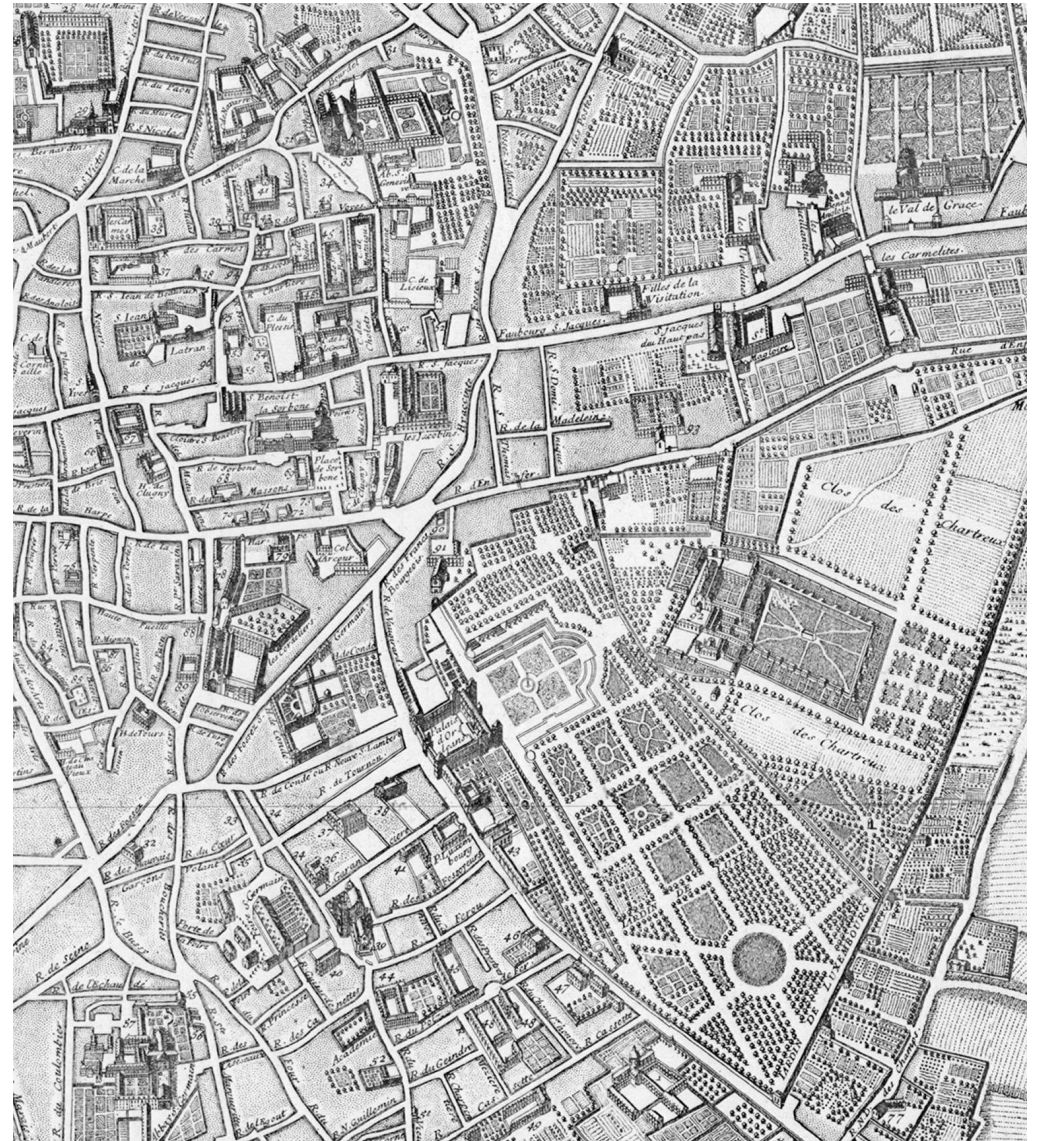
Following the same logic, the next step should be verifying in which way other towns were designed and if the same characteristics as those of Paris could be applied to them. This search brings me to an astonishing result.

## Berlin

Using the same principle as the one for Paris, and with the purpose of creating a celestial map for Berlin, I search for a symbolic element which could characterize a town in terms of energy.

This ends up in a drawing over the map of the city in which all the street crossings, intersections and squares of Berlin were pointed out with a marker. The walkways in natural parks and gardens are also included in order to induce a stronger concept of bipolarity, centered on the several kinds of energy associated with a notion of human presence and in this sense with a closer approach to human relations.

In a second stage, I make a drawing based on indications previously pointed out on the map, which I represent this time as points and circles. They should correspond to the number of stars, constellations and fictive galaxies to be painted «as a mirror» (see next page).



GeoGREIF - Historical town's sights and maps  
Titel: LUTECE ou Premier Plan de la Ville de Paris.

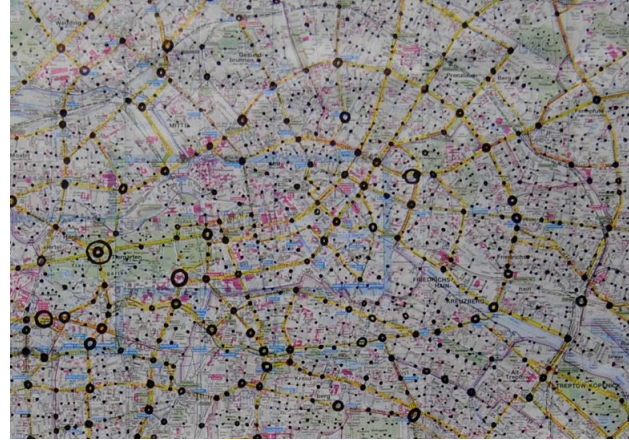
Karte: Sta 433 [At 67]

## The maps and their places on the globe

Once that each town to be worked on has in itself a different architectural characteristic and on the other hand, all are located in total different places on the globe – what makes sometimes more difficult to define which are the frontiers of its great areas – this influence the way each celestial chart is created.

Trying to find a way to relate with the different scales, I decide to represent them all in the same scale of 1:25.000. In some cases I choose a solution that reports to the unfolding of a map that has to be opened to enable it to be seen as whole. The bigger cities have to be distributed by several canvases. While Lisbon, due to the very narrow streets of the old zone of the town and to its diminute scale when compared with other cities, only allows the making of a drawing (59,5 x 42 cm); Berlin (135 x 95 cm) and Kyoto (155 x 110 cm) instead, have a similar size and allow to be painted on one canvas each. Thus Canberra, New York and Capetown have to be distributed by more elements. The last one is painted on 6 canvases, with a total dimension of 300 x 240 cm.

I choose to give them distinct characteristics. Berlin, for example, can give the impression of a starry sky in a clean night; Kyoto, a sky also, but that may remember a Japanese drawing; New York, a science fiction sky; Canberra, a set of stars with the shape of an island (or archipelago), as the country itself which is also an island. And finally Cape Town, a Middle Age celestial chart that wants to invent a new world and may allude the Portuguese history over seas. It is important, however, that the final paintings give an impression of night skies, rather than ones of cities seen from above in the night. It is this subtle character in which I am interested.



*Marked map of the town.*

*Detail of the image of page 6.*



*Detail of the image of page 7.  
Graphite on Japanese paper.*

*All the circles and points on this drawing correspond to the streetcrossing, intersections and squares from the image above.*



*Detail of the image of Page 8*

*The celestial map of Berlin is here represented as stars constellations and fictive galaxies.*



ADAC Street map of Berlin, marked, scale 1:25 000



Drawing of the street crossings, intersections, and squares of Berlin, 2011 — Grafit on japanese paper — 1,40 x 97 cm





Berlin, celestial chart - scale 1 : 25 000 — Oil on canvas, 2011/2012 — 138 x 95 cm

## A “diptych” for each continent

Although I see this project as a work in progress without end, I feel the need, in this point, to return to the reference source that brought me here - the cycle of the “Paradise” of Dantes Comedy - and to the intention to create a “diphthyc” for each continent.

Seen from a philosophical point of view, I can say that this project assumes here a sort of topography of thinking and of memory. Which allows me to use freely the intuition and think on the making of one piece that enables the connection to a ficticious and utopian place, that in turn can complement each celestial chart.

The next step is to create a very small sculpture, “a mountain”, with a maximal dimension of 10 to 12 centimeters high, to place on a plinth at a level of the viewer’s eyes.

Finally, I take the decision of creating the so mentioned “utopian place” for each celestial chart. Each has the shape of a cemetery existing in each town (see image on the right), and “somewhere located” on the nearest sea or ocean.

The drawings are made with indian ink on arches paper.

This project was shown from March to June, 2012, at Electricity Museum, Foundation EDP, in Lisbon.

**Prazeres**  
Atlantic  
*(Prazeres cemetery: christian)*



**Kiyomizu-dera**  
Pacific  
*(Kyoto cemetery: budist)*



**St. Matthäus-Kirchof**  
North Sea  
*(Prazeres cemetery: christian)*



**Jackie Robinson**  
Atlantic  
*(group of cemeteries: N.Y. Brooklyn and Queens: christian and jewish)*



**Ocean View**  
Borther of the Atlantic with the Indian  
*(Cape Town cemetery: islamic)*



**Gungahlin**  
Tasmanian Sea  
*(Canberra cemetery: jewish, islamic, ortodox and aboriginal)*

