

The choice of “periphery” as a theme is fascinating from many points of view as we can see by the way Erieta explores several of its dimensions through her photographs and comments. For a Brazilian of my generation, the concept of periphery has another strong connotation: “periphery” is how a group of influential economists in the 1950s and 60s referred to the condition of Latin America (and other developing countries) in the context of the Dependency Theory, which argued that resources flow from peripheral, less developed states to more wealthy states. It is not necessary to pursue this theory here, but what remains in my mind is that it relates not only to (geographical) distance, but also to inferiority and backwardness. Worse, it speaks to the conviction of the center (developed countries) that nothing particularly interesting, universal or relevant can come from the periphery. Even the natural and original circumstances of the subcontinent at the time were considered instruments of backwardness: the Amazon was referred to as the “green inferno” and indigenous people were dangerous and “uncivilized.” Fortunately, new generations think of the Amazon today as a preserved paradise with infinite biodiversity and they respect the traditional knowledge of its peoples.

Erieta’s endeavor is thus a new step in the reorientation of the term “periphery.” She takes us on a trip to “discover” or “rediscover” landscapes and architecture that are far from the center, looking for more than what is surprising or unknown and beyond the mere observation of what geology and architects have produced. But she is clearly not looking for the exotic with a view to shock. She is looking for beauty: both manmade and in the natural environment.

In this book she finds a common thread between themes that are often very different. Objectively, the randomness of the evolution of the natural environment and the extreme precision of the construction of a good architectural design are, in principle, opposite phenomena. The juxtaposition of photos that show nature as an inspiration for architecture is particularly daring. She is very at ease when she demonstrates that architects can face the challenge of building in a beautiful site with transparency, reflection, and integration through hiding or the use of materials borrowed from the surroundings or, finally, through a straightforward contrast.

Erieta’s photos of the places she is revealing to us are also technically brilliant. She does not seem centered on what geology, history, or architectural talent has created. She seems to be sharing a private experience; so private there is never anybody in the pictures. She displays a seductive critical censorship that directs the viewer towards what she wants us to see.

Erieta reminds us that these landscapes have existed for millions of years and only (very) few visitors can see them in person: seeing most of these landscapes has depended on illustrators, artists, photographers, and cinematographers to be revealed. Things only exist when we look at them (as Velázquez reminded us so clearly in *Las Meninas*). But as Malraux liked to repeat, “L’artiste n’est pas le transcripateur du monde, il en est le rival” (the artist is not the transcriber of the world, he is its rival). Erieta is certainly a great artist.