

In continuum: Interview with Ricardo Carvalho [1]

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Abstract

This interview forms part of a series of five interviews conducted between December 2022 and June 2023, based on an exercise developed by the architects Inês Lobo and Miguel Judas, in collaboration with a group of students from the Department of Architecture and Urbanism at the University Institute of Lisbon (DAU-ISCTE). The exercise began by identifying the issues considered most fundamental and relevant to the theory and practice of contemporary architecture, and resulted in the formulation of a set of questions. The city, the articulation between ecological and urban systems, housing, the common ground, forms of collective living, the durability and reversibility of construction, the binomial of tradition and industry, and the relationship between the discipline and society were the themes chosen to structure the conversations.

Based on this framework, five interviews were conducted with architects who combine professional practice, teaching and critical reflection on the discipline. Hailing from different geographical regions, cultural contexts and generational backgrounds – Tom Emerson, Ricardo Carvalho, Fernando Viegas, João Nunes and Jeremy Till – the interviewees were presented with the same set of questions, allowing us to observe not only differences of opinion but also points of convergence regarding some of the central challenges of contemporary architecture.

Keywords: Architecture, city, transformation, continuity, heritage, ecology

All interviews begin with a thank-you to the interviewee.

Thank you for inviting me.

We have identified eight topics, the first of which is the city. The issues that have arisen concern its definition, access, urbanity, density, and its relationship with the past and the future. In a text written in 2003, architect Jacques Herzog states: "It's time for us to get rid of manifestos and theories because they are not at the heart of the matter. There is no theory about the city; there are only cities." And then he questions: "How can we define it, since we cannot understand the most complex and interesting creation of the human race?" If we cannot describe our cities from models, how can we operate on them and find the logic for their requalification?

Well, thank you for the invitation. It's a pleasure to be here. I believe that Jacques Herzog, when he made this statement, was thinking of a time when most of the world's population was about to live in cities, which has proven true, as we know. And it was also speaking from a point of view and a time when there was a conflict that we have not yet resolved: the so-called historical centres are urban fabrics that, over the centuries, have evolved very cohesively and slowly and therefore, today we grasp these urban spaces as artifacts of collective memory, precisely because they are the result of many centuries of very slow morphological development and sometimes even typological development.

What happened with the second half of the twentieth century, as opposed to what I just said, is that the city began to grow into metropolis and with rapid non-systemic discontinuous morphological transformation, it gave rise to what we now call metropolitan areas or peripheral areas, and these are no longer amenable to be perceived as one thing, but can be perceived as many different things, many things difficult to connect and overlap and, as I said earlier, difficult to view a system. A French philosopher, Félix Guattari, wrote a text on this idea, which has little to do with the subjective city versus the historical city. The subjective city is exactly the city that is fractal, kaleidoscopic, and perhaps that is why Jacques Herzog says it is not possible to talk about models, because the great models we inherited from the history of Western architecture were models that managed, as an idea of beginning, middle and end, to solve parts of the city. If we only want to talk about the recent past, I could mention the nineteenth century city of Haussmannian matrix, that is, an orthogonal block that overlaps the medieval city, or later the hypothesis of the industrial city, by Tony Garnier, that is the first answer to the city that needs to expand in order to find the factories and solve the workers' problem, or even later, with a completely different political form, the city of the modern movement and above all the Weimar Republic in Germany, where many architects were able to build thousands of houses and reinvent the urban form from the idea of Garden City. Yet, since it was not the Garden City, it was already something else.

Today we know this city as the modern movement, but it had many configurations; it was called *Siedlungen*, satellite cities, and so on; up to the English *new towns*. This means that cities with beginning, middle and end and built as satellites of the great English and Scandinavian cities, until we reach the end of the twentieth century and, with the features

I listed, make it impossible to impose a model, because the model would never solve this level of complexity and the so-called *sprawl* - the diffuse city - which is a phenomenon that happens a little around the planet, but above all in the more industrialized world. For this *sprawl*, for this diffuse city, these models were, in fact, no longer an answer. And what Jacques Herzog proposes, which is not there in the quote, which was to me also a very interesting idea, is the idea of intervening with very powerful energy points, which he calls acupuncture, a little like the needles that are placed in the human body and that, through a relationship of different energy modes, provoke a change in metabolism. Therefore, when he says that there are no models, on the other hand, he proposes intervention, i.e., we cannot intervene in a global, holistic, unitary way, but we can intervene in a very strong way, changing the way in which energies are reconstituted in the urban system, and this has to do with redefining public space, the role of infrastructure and, of course, the hypothesis of improving the self-esteem of the less privileged populations. When a large building of collective equipment is built - be it a civic, sports or cultural centre - it becomes the point of acupuncture energy around which the urban fabric is restructured. This is a little like where we are and, in that sense, Jacques Herzog, in my view, was right in his statement, because we cannot solve the whole; we have to allocate maximum force to the power of the part, the fragment.

How do you preserve the identity of a city? Is there a specific material culture in each city?

I would say so. Though we could say this is a subject of the past, full of nostalgia and closely linked to issues of patriotism that have been exploited in the worst way by recent politics, I believe there is no escaping an idea of belonging. And the idea of belonging to a culture, to a city, has been permanently called into question since postmodernity, but has been permanently recovered. I give you an example: After WWII, at the time called the *baby boom* and the so-called *International Style*, it was believed that all Western cities would express themselves in the same way, with the same type of collective buildings and collective housing, something that Jacques Tati will then mock in the film *Play Time*, in which, suddenly, the cities are all the same. This could never be true, because human beings and homogeneity are in opposite poles.

The great turning point was, exactly, when you approach the idea of belonging and postmodernity in architecture, at least the most interesting one; it evidences that places are unrepeatable and that each architect or group of architects has to respond to a precise context that is not replicable. It is in this context that the work of architect Álvaro Siza arises. We are talking about the early 60s, here in Portugal, when an architect could propose an architecture that belongs to a comprehensive, worldwide, universal architectural culture. And yet the answer is fully grounded in the idea of context's unrepeatability, and this context you call identity – it's a less solid term – has to do with many things: it's about human, physical and material heritage; it has to do with frictions. The idea of belonging has always existed; it is continually reinvented because every new generation brings new people, as well as people who are not from those places, and thus identity is permanently reinvented. Therefore, the answer is yes, if we accept that identity is a process like the human adventure itself that is constantly calling itself into question and constantly reinventing itself, but I would say that today, the idea of belonging, the ambition of belonging, is something that feeds the humanisation of places. We associate the opposite to an idea of nightmare, don't we? Not belonging is seen as concerning.

The next theme is “entangled life”. It calls for the sharing, interconnection, and relationship among humans and between humans and nature. In one of his writings, Paulo Mendes da Rocha refers to the idea of urbanism, saying: “Urban is nothing. Urban is a state of mind. Urban is human, we are urban. And the city is our plot. A new plot among those who inhabit it. That is what I think urbanism is. The existence of an urban being who lives in trust, lives in hope and solidarity.” Nowadays, humans spend most of their time in designed spaces; should those who draw them remind [humans] that they are part of nature?

The human being is eminently urban, not only for the reasons already indicated, as architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha noted, but also from a statistical point of view. For a few years, less than ten, I believe, half of the planet's population was urban, so its analysis is both quantitative and on meaning. When José Adriaio and I interviewed Paulo Mendes da Rocha in 2007, I believe. The first question we asked him was about a quote from Max Weber, who said, “The air of the city frees us”. In reply, Paulo Mendes da Rocha said: “I agree, because in the countryside no one can see the people who die of hunger, only the ravens, whereas in the city, when someone is hungry, we are forced to look at these people in the eyes and are confronted with our own condition”, that is a powerful answer because it also contains another idea, which is responsibility, what it is to be urban. The adventure of the city, which is confused with the history of civilisation itself, has always had little to do with it. The first idea of a city, in addition to the Greek hypodynamical layout, i.e., the grid, included the idea of limit, of defining what a city was and what it was not, exactly for this reason, because the city was what it protected: it protected inhabitants from their enemy, protected them from the unknown, from the plague, from the wild animals, and those who were inside, those who belonged, were those who were not only protected, but also those who could cooperate. Therefore, the city implies protection, but it also implies cooperation, collective work, the idea of a common good. What Paulo Mendes da Rocha means by the idea of drawing makes us question the role, the true role of drawing when we think of architecture and urbanism. Often, the design is so good that we do not feel it.

In fact, when we travel and see London or Rome, what excites us most, in London, for example, is an idea of absolute repetition of an urban model, the idea of the house, the so-called *townhouse*, with the English courtyard and streets and streets always with the same window, with the same proportion, and the absolute repetition of an element, which was a kind of social homogenization, but also an idea of the common good, which stated that for the city everything seems measured and inside the house, inhabitants can reinvent themselves. We think: “this is impressive”, but this was designed, this was thought of by generations and generations of people who reached a proportion of vertical building, with a number of floors that invented a courtyard that is a kind of moat for the street, who invented a minimal typology with a quite vertiginous staircase inside that allowed many people to stay in that battery of vertical buildings, invented a way to use the brick, invented a way of working the carpentry and, often, the idea of belonging and definition of individuality came a little from the color of the same carpentry. Therefore, there was drawing, and drawing is not exclusively what we can imagine, such as what we now call design, or a great affirmation of an idea of subjective creativity from architecture. Drawing, for me, implies this. And in Rome it is even more powerful, because it is 2000 years of drawing history, 2000 years of many architects drawing different things, often things that react to what they had inherited, and when we walk

through the city, this overlap of the various times and the various drawings continues to tell us that, more important than knowing who did what is what is there, the artifact built. Therefore, I believe the responsibility of drawing may be somewhat diminished because, if it is understood over a long time in the city, it is perceived as memory, as tradition. We are very trained to think now about our lifetime, 50 years back and 50 years forward, but if we think about the city with a completely different timeline, we see that the drawing is diluted in time, and that's when I think it begins to be truly fascinating, not disregarding exceptional buildings, but that's another story. But on the whole, I believe that the great challenge of drawing is that it is understood as time. However, it was drawing.

What is the role of nature in cities?

Today, it is everything. I have been reading James Lovelock's books; he was a scientist, thinker, and philosopher. He was a pioneer in philosophical thought on nature as a system. What James Lovelock proposed in the 1960s was the idea that the planet is a whole, which he called "Gaia". The movie Avatar is loosely based on this: the idea of nature as a single body reacting to a threat. Lovelock's idea of Gaia is that there is no "we" and nature, or there is no fauna and flora; there is everything; everything is one thing, and when intervening in one, we must intervene in all. And this is highly relevant because, when Lovelock proposed this hypothesis, no one really listened, but more recently, many philosophers, urbanists and artists have worked from it. For example, today there is a theory called the *wood wide web*, which parallels the internet's *World Wide Web*. This theory concerns a scientific experiment conducted in a forest that demonstrates that when a tree needs help, the surrounding trees, through their roots, provide it with nutrients, illustrating a sense of cooperation. This idea provides a possible answer to the question: "If we are here, if there were people who could clarify this, do we now have a responsibility to read these texts and use them in our fields, architecture included?" And of course we do; there is no chance that architecture will continue to be predatory nowadays, because architecture, for many centuries, has not been predatory; it has become so. Very recently, in fact. In the history of human adventure, architecture is predatory for a very brief time that, unfortunately, is our lifetime. We have the means to realise that it may not be so. I think the big challenge is to use radical thinking, radical science, to start reacting, for example, to what is happening in the industry linked to reflection on waste, namely, garbage concrete, beams made with recycled plastic, and we could continue. Around the world, many developments are underway as human intelligence seeks answers. The idea of nature, if we see it as "Gaia", as proposed by James Lovelock, allocates architecture with an even greater responsibility; since we are transformation, which is what we do, our responsibility is immense. How are we going to do this now? We have many means at our disposal.

Are we not only creating more waste if the culture is not one of constant restoration and reuse?

Yes, waste may be the word. Modern/contemporary culture is a culture of waste. Of course, the big challenge today is to reverse the role of waste, that is, instead of being a dead-end path, to make waste a construction material, as I mentioned earlier, such as plastic beams, garbage concrete, among many other possibilities. The idea of material deposits, where architects can collect architectural components and reassemble them. This is being tested in Sweden, for example, where buildings are being dismantled because they are no longer needed, and their components are measured and numbered for storage. An organisational chart records their dimensions for reuse in new projects. I

am talking, for example, about prefabricated concrete from the 1960s. So, there is a lot going on that makes us optimistic. Where are we, or should we be, less optimistic about? That this thought, as in everything, is still not prevalent, i.e., is there time for this to become mainstream thought? That is the big challenge.

The 20th century was marked by the search to provide housing - the “housing for the largest number” was central to architecture and the creation of a city, especially through public construction. More recently, faith emerged in the “invisible hand of the market” and private investment as a response to the problem. A belief that the current phenomena of urban gentrification have placed the city in a crisis. The right to housing, and to the city, should they be a universal right?

It is a universal right, but that does not mean that it is guaranteed; i.e., it is inscribed, a bit like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was laid down a long time ago (for more than a century, I believe). However, unfortunately, we can always find situations and contexts in which this is not guaranteed. Regarding housing, I do not fully agree with one of your statements: private initiative, not only public, has built a city. If we talk about Europe, this is key; an example of this is the Haussmann plan in Paris. This plan, in the eyes of a more radical political thought, was perhaps a major neoliberal turn - within what could be neoliberal at that time – because parts of the medieval city, where people with fewer resources lived - the so-called popular classes - were destroyed to build avenues and boulevards, and a new bourgeoisie settled there, for huge profit from a business point of view. We could also mention Baixa Pombalina, which occurred a century earlier. One of the darkest stories of this process that several historians today tell is that, when designing the new Baixa Pombalina, the best locations were redistributed, benefiting the families closest to the Marquis of Pombal, something that arose from private initiative, although this process was viewed as public. Therefore, it is a difficult balance because the city always arises from private individual initiative. Many of the good things that the history of the city, at least of the western city, has given us have to do with these ideas of private property, initiative, entrepreneurship, and the idea that not everything is the result of a collective or public thought.

However, in the early 20th century, as large numbers of people moved from the countryside to the city to work in factories, this process could no longer be left to chance. And that's what happened in the 19th century. That is why, when we read Charles Dickens, for example, whose work is a realistic and harsh portrait of London in the 19th century, we see that the fact that no one cared about it led to exploitation, degradation, and plague. The modern movement, as you said, sees this as an urgent situation, which is what we have today, although it is not exactly the same. And the urgent situation of the modern movement was a pre-revolutionary one, because the so-called proletarian classes could not live under the conditions in which they lived without this problem being regarded as a public or national problem. And that is what the German architects, especially the German architects, did in those years of the Weimar Republic - and did very well. And the impact was so significant that all European countries eventually adopted some of those models.

We don't have much time today, but they started with a very simple idea of Garden City and turned it into a much more powerful city idea where the city was no longer countryside or city; it was something in between. Today, there is urgency because

ordinary citizens, even if they have a job, can no longer guarantee the right to housing in large European cities. And therefore, on a much more twisted level - how can the Western world middle class fail to guarantee this basic right? And so what is the possible answer? And in this instance, I agree, the answer must be at the public level. I do not believe that here in Portugal the answer is being given as it deserves, because, at other times in history, this was the situation that gave rise to the pretext to reinvent an idea of public space, an idea of living in community, an idea of housing typology, and I do not think this is happening. This leads to a weird situation in which the so-called social housing replicates housing typologies of the speculative private initiative - the famous "T" - which clearly do not serve your generation, for example, because family concepts are also dynamic. We also know that most people in European cities today live alone, something that is absolutely new. Unlike in the past, when several generations lived in the same house, most urban residents in European cities live alone, and houses serve only one person. This implies a new thought about typology.

Switzerland, a country with abundant resources, has implemented a very surprising program, in which collective housing buildings are designed as follows: on each floor, there is a communal kitchen and several bedrooms, each with a bathroom and a small kitchenette. This results in buildings in which several people can live: seniors, students, young couples with a child... As the rooms are relatively small, the building's common spaces, such as the communal kitchen and the rooms, end up being spaces of greater generosity, reinforcing the idea of meeting and living together. Although they are typologies never before experienced, there are already several examples of great success. And what can we do? It is very expensive to live in Switzerland, so many people live alone, prompting architects to reflect on these ideas. Here in Portugal, this has happened before. It is still not happening. It is important that interviews like these and works like what you are doing propagate because, as in everything, the strength of an idea allows things to happen, but everything has to start with an idea.

Is the "right to the city" the architect's duty rather than that of common citizens?

No. I don't think so.

Is it possible to reconcile the right to housing with profit generation?

The two things have always coexisted, at least in capitalist societies, and I believe they will have to continue coexisting. We could also define what profit is in the future - a balanced society is profit, right? If by profit we mean pure material profit, we will again be exposed to a situation in which, in many cases, there will be social tension and instability. What is interesting in capitalist systems is that, on the verge of instability, the system reinvented itself, and some answers emerged, allowing this unstable balance to remain. When this does not happen, the rupture occurs. I believe that this coexistence is possible; I would even say that it is desirable, because absolute stability is also not a guarantee that things change for the better and, therefore, both things will have to live together, a little like this idea that in politics is very common, that is the third way. That is, what is the alternative to the revolution? It is the third way. And the third way is, in my view, cooperation and intelligence, in which all knowledge is applied to a kind of compromise so that the revolution is not necessary. Regarding the other question, "Is the right to the city the architect's duty more than the other citizens?", I was very peremptory in my answer because the city belongs to everyone, and I think we cannot

delude ourselves about the architect's role. This idea that, in theological thought, God is the architect of the Universe had far-reaching consequences. The power of architecture is relatively limited. We have the power to transform people's lives when we are allowed to do so, but from the point of view of society, the great strength in the city is not the strength of architecture; it is the strength of ideas, of economic thought, of the economic models that each society adopts in order to continue living together. And what is happening today is that there is a very great postponement of what we want, in abstention in the elections, in the idea that consumption can appease everything. And this is terrible because it makes us lose the concept of citizenship, of active participation in what must be transformation. This is the great danger, but I think that the power of architects is a power among others; I see nothing that we have more power than others. We have a huge responsibility.

Doris Salcedo, the contemporary Colombian artist, said in one of her interviews, “My process is to interfere, to insert myself into public space obliquely and not directly, so that others may, in turn, claim space for themselves.” Is the public space a tool of social cohesion?

It is the space of dialogue and conflict; it is the space of the other. It is perhaps the only moment in contemporary societies when we genuinely confront each other. Doris Salcedo is an extraordinary artist who has explored the tension in the relationship with the other, which often implies fear and distrust, but also empathy and love. Therefore, at a time when social networks clearly overlap with an idea of public space, I would say that the real public space, the public condition of the city, is the moment when we can measure with the other and, as Paulo Mendes da Rocha said, we can see all that is happening around us. The public space has another very interesting feature. The Western world produced, from the 18th and 19th centuries, such a powerful public space, so cohesive, so strong that today we see it as “the public space” by nature.

When we walk through Baixa de Lisboa, for example, in Rossio, in Praça da Figueira, in Praça do Comércio, that idea of public space is so perfect in its material condition and in its symbolic condition that it makes it very difficult to find the answer to the question: “what is contemporary public space?”. And, often, we have seen architects using designations such as “boulevard”, “Rambla”, “symbolic square” in contemporary spaces where this turns out to be very strange, because there are many places in the contemporary city which are not in the city centre where we started this conversation, but in the outskirts. Imagine a 1970s Lisbon suburb, built on the idea of material profit, with eight-story buildings, practically devoid of porous spaces, and a need for a new public space. Would it make sense to say it was a Rambla? Or a boulevard? I would say no. Therefore, the great challenge for architects is: What is this new public space? And this is something that has been delayed in emerging. There is that extraordinary reflection by Lacaton and Vassal, from the late 90s, in which there was a square refurbishing competition in a small neighbourhood in Bordeaux and Jean-Philippe Vassal and Anne Lacaton wrote a text, the project for the competition, describing how extraordinary the square is, like the ones seniors use it to play in, as the yard is beautiful. They say the benches and trash bins must be refurbished, preferably without stainless steel, and that's about it. This is a great lesson in architecture. Why? Because there is no need to change for change's sake. There are things that are really cohesive and imply another idea introduced here: belonging. If we destroy that idea of belonging in favour of

design, we are doing a disservice to the common good. And, therefore, what is contemporary public space?

Where is it truly exciting? There is an incredible example in New York, designed by Diller and Scofidio and James Corner, a landscape architect, in which the architects propose transforming an old commercial railway station that only transported goods into a linear public space. That was incredibly successful! What came next? Profit. All the buildings that flank the High Line have been refurbished, some of them by well-known architects. And therefore, what was a waste - what, at first glance, would be to demolish or perhaps transform into a conventional metro network - was transformed into a public space that has a little of everything: connection, contemplation, some amphitheatres face the streets, one side has plants for oxygen, a kind of botanical museum, with all plants identified, and it is very beautiful. Therefore, human invention will always have an answer, but it has involved much struggle. There are very few examples, or at least I do not know of any, of an invention of contemporary public space.

How public can a private building be?

Paulo Mendes da Rocha, of whom we have already spoken, has this overwhelming phrase: "all architecture is public." I am convinced that this is absolutely true. I usually share this idea, not exactly with these words, with my words, that is: Any project, however small, serves a thought about the common good, even if it is to raise the self-esteem of a community. For example, you have a chance to intervene in a more or less depressed area. Your work will probably be the first work done by an architect in that context, with the delicacy that this work is expected to have, which will raise the self-esteem not only of those who ordered it, but also of everything that is around, because people, when they walk by and look, they will feel the difference. Some will find it strange, others will find it beautiful, and others will want the same. The responsibility of a small project turns out to be, in terms of strength, very similar to that of a large project, because everything depends on the context in which it operates. And in this sense, all architecture is public, because everything we do is expected and is a kind of common thing for this world to become better. Often, a client, without realising it, is the main pretext for this to happen. This is the absolutely extraordinary part of our profession - that people who seek us for a job are often a means for this work to create a new meaning and a new ambition, a new desire for beauty as well. There is a word that we have not yet spoken - beauty - which has a lot to do with the idea of the common good.

Hashim Sarkis questions what collective dwelling entails, saying that "We need a new space contract. In the context of growing political divisions and economic inequalities, we must imagine spaces in which we can live together generously. Together as human beings who, despite our growing individuality, wish to connect and with other species across digital and real spaces, together as new families searching for more diverse and worthy housing spaces, together as emerging communities that demand equity, inclusion and spatial identity. Together across political borders to imagine new geographies of association. And together as a planet that faces crises that require global action, so that we can continue to live(...)". How can a housing building ensure an experience of sharing a common space among its inhabitants?

The answer is: completely, completely. An example in Lisbon is Bairro das Pedras, designed by Ruy Jervis D'Athouguia and Sebastião Formosinho Sanchez, in the late 1950s. For the first time, here in Portugal, we have a neighbourhood rising from the ground up, with a garden, a public park, under the building, designed by Gonçalo Ribeiro Telles. From the moment that this idea, which is an idea of the modern movement, as we all know, is built and drawn in the neighbourhood of Alvalade, which, as we know, is a neighbourhood of high quality at all levels, but from the moment when, within a cell, of the eight cells of the neighbourhood, this common life hypothesis is constructed, which is the idea of the continuous park, of course people immediately perceive the difference. This is so powerful and so strong that, when something does not correspond to what the project offers, people protest; something happened when they interrupted part of the garden. And therefore, what is truly relevant is to guarantee people the right to something that architecture allows: the possibility of living in many different ways, be lifted from the ground, either downwards or on the roof. From the moment this is offered, there is no way back. Why is the periphery so fascinating as a work topic? Precisely because it is based on an idea of profit. And the buildings have been built without regard for the common good. Today, the question is: how are we going to attribute this idea of the common good to what is already built? Shall we demolish part of it? I would say yes, I defend that. Let us intervene in the buildings and, for example, empty the ground floors, which serve as housing, to make way for shops, because shops greatly enhance the sense of community through security and coexistence, or shall we empty a whole floor in each building for collective activities? Or shall we change the roofs? That is, our job is to create precedents.

From the moment a precedent is created, and this has happened in the last hundred years with ideas about collective dwelling, others will come - that I call impact. That is why a building of the modern movement was never strictly the same when copied: each time it was copied, a building by Le Corbusier became something different; whenever copied, a building by Bruno Taut (as Siza mentions) always became something different. A building by Ernst May, which made the new Frankfurt, was always a different thing whenever copied, and we could continue... So our work is to open precedents, and when this precedent is generated, and people see how important it is to have a common space under a building, or a floor in the middle of the building that is a collective floor, or a common room on the roof with a fabulous view, the demand for this is generated. The great problem of our urban Portuguese culture is that this requirement has become very circumscribed to the urban upper middle classes, and therefore the whole metropolitan city has not been the object of this possibility, and your work now, generationally speaking, is exactly to contaminate the great infinite city, diffuse with these ideas, so that the common heritage of architecture truly reaches everyone.

The interview book “On and Around Architecture: Ten Conversations”, by Jonathan Sergison and Stephen Bates, explores the idea of approaching a collective housing project over its lifetime. Its skeleton, from the perspective of these architects, must have a long lifespan and be regarded as a permanent ruin, only transitorily inhabitable. For this, it must be flexible and lasting. The other life cycles are average, i.e., they must adapt to changes. The skeleton is thus inhabited by various components of the building, such as those that ensure the operation of the infrastructure, as well as the facades and the enclosure. This separation in three moments forces us to another way of designing. Time is once again a fundamental

datum in the process - construction time and lifetime. How should we define flexibility in architecture?

What Stephen Bates and Jonathan Sergison propose is a very beautiful and scholarly idea: contemporary architecture can act as pre-modern architecture acted. The idea of authorship gives way to an idea of process, a little like it happened until the nineteenth century, in which buildings were designed by generations of architects, often parents and children, in fact, I was with Ines Lobo recently in Bath and saw some examples from 18th-century beautiful buildings, the famous *crescents*. in which, generations of architects, therefore, sometimes father, son and grandson, worked in the buildings and giving way to this idea of process. I think Sergison Bates talks about this today, but adding new information: the search for ever-greater responsibility regarding the idea of coating and infrastructure, which, as we know, are subject to science today and, therefore, will be increasingly responsible from an ecological point of view. And, therefore, if we ensure that the skeleton, the structure, is well designed, beautiful and perennial, we know that the enclosure can change according to what artistic and scientific thought can create to permanently belong to the concept of Gaia. And that's a bit what is being discussed in this conversation about this book, which I also know and like a lot. The idea that a building can generate an intelligent ruin. In fact, it was what we inherited from the ruins of the Western world. That is what we see in Greek architecture today: the coatings are gone; we are faced with ruin. And that is the great emotion - when we confront Greek architecture - the thrill of seeing intelligent ruins. I think these two British architects are proposing a radical idea that is: "so go, let's try to build what currently exists in a city, collective housing, at the level of the Parthenon".

Today, we are aware that the construction industry, as well as the use of buildings, is one of the largest sources of pollution on the planet, directly or indirectly. But we are still called to build at a time of climate urgency. The present, therefore, seems an opportunity to rethink what it means to build and what it should entail. This seems to impose changes on everyone involved in the process: designers, industry and builders.

What is your perception of the construction industry today compared to other moments in our history when industrialisation played a leading role?

I would say that it is a role the industry will be forced into. I would also say that the possible way forward is through legislation. Often, the idea of the law, whether in social habits or in crime, right and wrong, is at the forefront of society itself. This has happened many times over these centuries. The very idea of human rights, which we have just talked about, is far ahead of reality itself. When many thinkers tried to question slavery in the Western world, in Europe and the United States, they did so seven decades before slavery itself was abolished, globally speaking. Here it is no different; there is a heritage of scientific and artistic thought that is far ahead of reality. What will happen is that we will now have regulations on construction, laws, and tax benefits for companies that may want to be included in this strategy, and this will drive most actions. It has always happened like this. As I said just now, I will say it again: our great challenge is the time available for this process to actually take place. James Lovelock, in his last book, in 2019, shortly before he died, even speaks of a very challenging idea: probably the humans of the future, whom he calls "post-humans", will look at us as we look at Neanderthal and in this sense this is the answer to this question: we are at a time when we are going to establish these processes legally and morally. Then, we need to let the

world settle and follow. But I think this will no longer be for any of us sitting around this table.

What is valued among architects, sometimes consensual, does not necessarily correspond to what is valued by the “ordinary person”. Thus, the question arises: What defines good architecture?

I have been doing this exercise for a long time: looking for a possible definition of architecture. For me, it is thought and construction - it is this binomial. If it is only thought, it fails to commit to change; if it is only construction, it currently fails to meet the ambition of engaging in dialogue with the history of architecture, with the history of technique, with the very idea of nature, of the natural systems that we have already talked about here. For me to feel that something is architecture, I have to feel this, and I think we should not be afraid to assume that in most manifestations that imply civil construction, only a small part is architecture, and only a small part is able to take this idea of the Olympic torch dialogue with the world from one to many, horizontally, vertically, whatever.

Everything else is a kind of episodic action that is necessary, noble, often noble, but that is not even architecture. Our field is a field that began with the ability of a group of women and men to look at what they were doing and write treatises about how a lintel and a beam are made, which means the place of fire, what is a wall, symbolically and materially speaking. Therefore, for me, architecture will always imply that. There are times when it is more thought. An example is 18th-century architects during the French Revolution, when there were no means, for example, to put into practice what they proposed, and there are times when it is highly operative and revolutionary, as in the modern movement. Today, there are many more architects, and many people trained in architecture. This has given rise to a new and quite fascinating expansion, an expansion in discussion, I would say, almost to infinity, because there have never been so many people prepared to discuss architecture. When I hear that people may not adhere to an architect's work, I tend to see it from an architect's perspective. People did not adhere to Centre Georges Pompidou when it was built in Paris; however, it is a work that no one could imagine being demolished today. Or when architect Álvaro Siza began building Chiado, and people did not immediately understand his work. Maybe that was because the process was very slow, but today we know that it was probably the most important reflection on the city that Lisbon had in the 20th century. At least that's how I see it, and I know I'm not the only one.

We will always have to think that in artistic and scientific thought - architecture calls both - we do not have to permanently agree with what people think. Often, our duty is even to be where we are not supposed to be, because, as I have already said today, precedents must be opened, and once a precedent has been opened, its quality has been proven, people will adhere, I am sure.

Thank you very much.

Thank you.



Notes

[1] The interview was held in December 2022, by Inês Lobo, Miguel Judas and a group of Architecture students together from the Department of Architecture and Urbanism at the University Institute of Lisbon (DAU-ISCTE): Alex Carneira, Alexandra Reis, Ana Rebelo, Carolina Joaquim, Daniel Assunção Silva, Diana Corte Real, Isla de França, Leonardo Esteves, Mara Santos Inácio, Maria Malato, Mariana Freire, Margarida Nogueira Correia e Rita Antunes.