

Interview with architect Rui Mendes

Filipa Ramalhete

framalhete@autonoma.pt

CEACT/UAL - Centro de Estudos de Arquitectura, Cidade e Território da Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, Portugal | Centro Interdisciplinar de Ciências Sociais, Universidade Nova de Lisboa (CICS.Nova)

João Caria Lopes

joaocarialopes@gmail.com

Atelier BASE | Centro de Estudos de Arquitectura, Cidade e Território da Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa (CEACT/UAL), Portugal

To cite this paper: RAMALHETE, Filipa; LOPES, Joao Caria – Interview with architect Rui Mendes. **Estudo Prévio** 14. Lisbon: CEACTION/UAL - Centro de Estudos de Arquitectura, Cidade e Território da Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, 2018. ISSN: 2182-4339 [Available at: www.estudoprivio.net]. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26619/2182-4339/14.3>

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We are happy to have architect and university lecturer Nuno Mateus as our guest. Welcome. We wanted to start by asking you to tell us a little about you as a student, your degree in Architecture, your professors, and your outstanding exercises.

Thank you for inviting me. I am delighted to be here. I studied at Lusíada University in Lisbon in the early 1990s, and, looking back, it was quite a confusing degree program. There was minimal reflection on architecture; I immediately felt that there was no autonomy and that it had to be introduced. I went to classes now and again in the first year because I was not drawn to them. Besides the first-year professors, Nuno Simões and Barbara São Miguel, who remain important, there were no other Project teachers I can mention as relevant to me, except when I met architect Manuel Tainha in the fifth year. In him, I found a professor. I was a student of architect Orlando Azevedo (with architect Joaquim Braizinha). Still, I think I found my teacher in architect Tainha - who I met already as a graduate because my first studio was in the building where architect Tainha had his studio, and we ended up being neighbours.

As a student, the teachers who ended up being most relevant to me were those teaching Drawing and History, already in the third or fourth year, if I am not mistaken... João Rodeia was quite important because he was very enthusiastic and organised trips with the students - we went to Paris with him, which was great! Maybe that was my first school

trip ... and trips help a lot! Your relationship with your colleagues' changes, and other relationships with architecture are encouraged, and this was very important. The Drawing teachers were Sérgio Rebelo, Miguel Navas and Teresa Rodeia.

When I was in my fourth year, I started working. I started working rather informally with architect Mateus Lorena. Architect Mateus's friends were a group of Drawing teachers, and we ended up being together outside school, too; nowadays, we are friends. Perhaps this was the most interesting thing that resulted from school, this communion with people who had been my teachers, who are now friends.

There was an architect whose work also interested me, Professor Reaes Pinto. He taught construction, prefabrication, and heavy stuff, the type of stuff that was not referenced at the time but that I enjoyed learning about. This may have been a relevant preamble to my work: to bring together several things within the studio, the project, periodic investigations and permanent obsessions....

Was the continuity between university and studio or job market a fluid thing for you?

No, it was not. I graduated in 1996/7, and until 2003/4, I had no contact with the school. I was very indecisive about what I would do. The trips were essential at that time. Both the trips with the school and the ones we organised outside the school - I travelled a lot; I did long stays sponsored by the Rotary Club, a club to which my father belonged, which had partners worldwide and organised workshops. I stayed a long time in Italy, Lake Como, Denmark, the black forest in Germany, Greece, etc.

Suddenly, we started to have orders in the studio with Mateus Lorena, but that pragmatism - my work with Mateus was always inspiring - especially the relationship with the clients and the labour market, was something I was not yet prepared for

I had already written two letters - one to Siza and the other to Josep Quetglas, an architect I had started reading about at school and interested me - but one day, I decided to apply to a competition in Beja. I went to Beja for work, and then I left Lisbon. I did not go to Porto to work with Siza. I did not go to Barcelona to contact Quetglas. I went to Beja. A place where I had never been and had no idea what I would do there. I know that the competition was exciting, outside Lisbon, and in the introduction, it said something I wanted: to design projects for that territory!



Was it a job for the City Hall?

Yes, it was a job for the City Hall. I was there for a year because it was a one-year contract, and I was entirely on my own that year! One person in the City Hall designed projects, and that was me. But what projects were these? I needed to invent them, didn't I? I did! Initially, I did two fascinating things. I had my own driver, and I needed to know that territory. The mayor had told me: "Look, before we give you incredible projects to design, you have to know the area and, therefore, you have this gentleman at your disposal who will show you everything..." and that's what happened... Every day, at seven in the morning, we would be ready to start our trip, and until two in the afternoon, we would travel through all the villages and all the streets and talk to the people there. This had a purpose that I did not know at first, which was a huge competition, a very cherished thing in the City Hall, which was called "Concurso da Rua Caiada", aimed at choosing the best street in that place each year.

The City Hall supplied the materials. The City Hall provided the lime and the brushes.

It offered lime and brushes, and people painted the houses and made a party of it, women and men, each had their function, and this was a curious and wonderful thing that I enjoyed witnessing, a version of Popular Architecture that I still knew only about from the Survey on Popular Architecture in Portugal (1961); I did not know that scale, I

did not know those materials. And it was amazing! Those three months were a sort of essay on popular culture, which nobody spoke of in school... That experience made me want to stay for some time longer and try to build something with that knowledge, and that led me to want to know more about the survey and learn about those rural realities better. At the time, in the late 1990s, 1998/1999, in Beja, several people, including architects, photographers and some artists, were experiencing something similar to what I was living: they were out of place. This side of discovery, no one was from there; there were many architects I met there who were also seduced by this culture....



The Alqueva Dam was under construction, wasn't it? At that time, it should almost be filling with water.

That had already started. And the poverty in those territories did not exist anymore, and there were funds to plan some events. And the projects that the City Hall had asked to do were now a reality - the Mortuary House of Santa Vitoria; the Trigaches Party Hall; a slight expansion of the Beja Stadium, a house for a gypsy family. All this was started, and nothing was actually built! Because there was a time when, say, the decisions depended on politics, and any plan was closely scrutinised by the parish councils, it was difficult to start building something different from what they had always known. The only thing I could build that year was a completely unique and almost invisible thing: a small garbage bin for the city centre, which was then produced (about 1500, if I remember). I decided to leave because nothing came to fruition. Still, I retained from the experience

that this was my first great relationship with architecture, a live experience of the architecture survey. And several friends for life. This is the first stage that, perhaps, ended the learning phase. That is never simple or isolated.

You opened the way, then?

No. I did not open the way; architect Manuel Faião, who is still there, did that. Architect Eugénio Castro Caldas became a City Hall consultant after architect Hestnes Ferreira. Architect Castro Caldas leaves Hestnes Ferreira's studio and does the follow-up on Beja, Serpa and Mértola. But before that, there were still other great architects who did important projects in Beja, especially José Rafael Botelho, who was the first architectural consultant of the City Hall in the 1950s and who, for some time, produced important surveying work that led to the City's Safeguard Plan. And then there was architect Cristino da Silva, who designed the high school, Liceu de Beja; architect Raul Choro Ramalho, who built the Hospital; architect Francisco Keil do Amaral, who built the Hotel of the Air Base in the neighbourhood Bairro dos Alemães; and architect Hestnes Ferreira's work in the 1970s/1980s. More recently, architect Pedro Viana Botelho expanded Liceu de Beja. As you can see, the path is already long. Besides Beja Romana (which continues to be excavated), there is a series of great architects who, at different times, have worked in Beja.



That means it was also a meeting point with a number of people who, not being those you were looking for, had a practice and know-how you would not have found elsewhere, right?

Yes, I think it was a surprise. At the time, I had left school and knew very little beyond the most universal references on international and national architecture. There was minimal production, even printed and published. And I met architects I had never heard of, who had never been in any conversation or debate in school and the studios.

That reminded me of architect Pedro Pacheco, who held a conference in Beja at that time about his museum, Museu da Luz. I met Pedro Pacheco at that conference, and when I arrived in Lisbon, I started working at his and José Adrião's studio. I end my first year in Beja; I return to Lisbon and knock on his door. I wanted to work for a relatively small studio, and José Adrião and Pedro Pacheco's was a studio that people spoke about at the time. And it was at Studio JAPP that I met Fernando Martins, with whom I had joint projects.

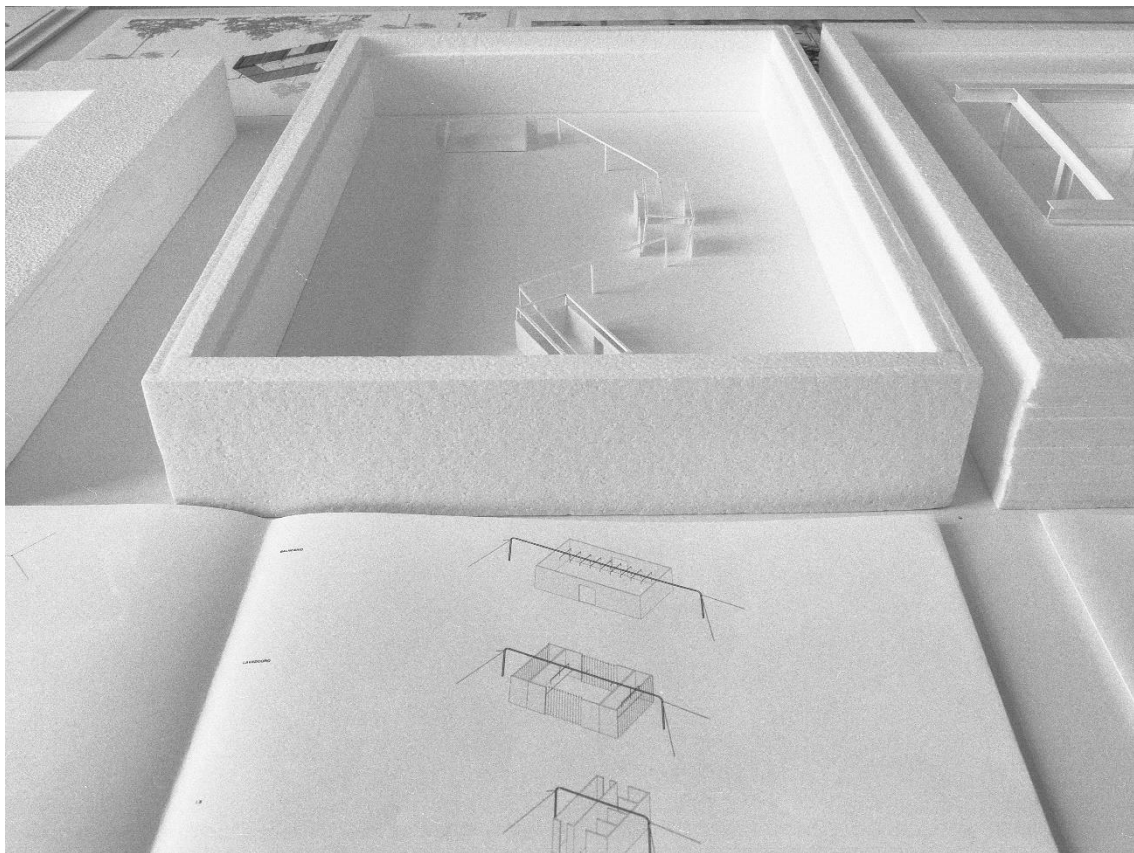
And do you want to tell us what it was like until you had your studio?

That happened fast. I worked with José Adrião and Pedro Pacheco in their studio for a year and a half. I witnessed their division into two studios. I worked with them on a project for Matosinhos and then only with Pedro Pacheco in the Estrela village, in Estrela

Cemetery. At the same time, I had the order to design Casa de Santa Vitoria in Beja. I started working on that project in the studio, but one day, I decided to leave - which is probably unthinkable today because I had only one project... I just thought, "I have a job, it's high time I got my own studio!"

When was that?

This was in 2000/2001. I came to Lisbon in 1999; I worked at JAPP studio; in 2001, I had my own studio. And I started with one project!



And an architect. Were you alone at that time?

Yes, I was alone. There is a story to this. At the time, I was no longer working with architect Mateus Lorena. Still, I had some unfinished things... We were invited to enter a contest to design a school in Braço de Prata. We created a large team with José Maria Assis, Tiago Oliveira, Patricia Barbas, Joao Nunes, Pere Buil and Jordi Fornells – a series of people who worked at Bugio Studio, a studio by João Favila with Gonçalo Byrne and Manuel Ayres Mateus. We just created a team. We did not win that contest. Architect Telmo Cruz won this contest, which, unfortunately, was not built. After this event, I founded the studio.

Jordi Fornells, Pere Buil and I set up a studio and shared a vast space in Príncipe Real. I was alone doing my own design, but the studio was a set of small studios and remained that way for ten years. It was a unique studio because it was shared with Luciana Fina, a video director, Vera Mantero, Rumo do Fumo, Teatro do Vestido, and Miguel Gonçalves Mendes, a film director. Many people shared the space and wanted to share what we were doing. It resembles my current studio with architect Jordi Fornells here in Lisbon.

Have you always wanted to be an architect?

Yes. Although I do not have a great story about it, when I considered applying to university, there were only two programs I thought interested me - Architecture or Cinema. However, cinema was not a possibility at that moment, so I applied to Architecture. My parents say that there were never any doubts.

And attending the program confirmed your choice?

Yes, yes, it was only during the program.... I think that interest increased only in the middle of the program.

Manuel Tainha was a teacher of many of our interviewees but in a previous stage. You eventually caught him in a more mature phase. Would you like to talk a little about this experience?

The truth is that I was not his student. I attended architect Manuel Tainha's classes but was not his formal student. I was a fifth-year student of architect Braizinha and had classes with Orlando Azevedo, who I remember being very concerned with pedagogical issues. We had good conversations about work processes. I think that maybe that encouraged me to attend Tainha's classes as well. I think that was his last year as a teacher, so it was the end of his activity as a teacher, and maybe that was why I kept this memory of the classes being very serious in a certain sense. The sentences were very well spoken, and what he had to say was something I felt was very founded on his work; it sounded solid, something I would certainly remember, and therefore, I attended his classes based on that belief. He did not give me any grade, he did not assess me at all, but he was perhaps the teacher I listened to the most time and more often.



Nowadays you teach at Autónoma University of Lisbon. Have you always had this desire to be an architecture teacher?

Yes, at some point. The first invitation I had to be a teacher was from architect Ricardo Carvalho when he was at Universidade Moderna with several people who are now at Autónoma or other universities. I remember that, at that time, in 2004/2005 – Ricardo Carvalho and I met to conduct a survey of 20th-century architecture, which the Portuguese Architects Association organised. The coordinator was Ana Tostões, and Ricardo was already a teacher, had already chosen this path, and, at the time, invited me to Universidade Moderna to teach Theory.

We were doing the survey and something else for the Association – research about architect Pires Branco, at the time Helena Roseta was Association President; basically, it was a study about a set of modern non-canonical architects who had stayed in the countryside– and, as I wanted to do everything right, I thought that this experience of being a teacher could wait. I told Ricardo that it was not the time to accept his invitation. At the same time, Ricardo Carvalho was invited to teach at Autónoma, and soon after, I started going to Autónoma for some project reviews, giving a seminar, do a *workshop* and; therefore, this wish to teach increased due to these occasional invitations to present at a conference or review students' work; that moment arrived in 2008. And it was frankly

stimulating to get to Autónoma and meet people I admired and cherished, with whom I had worked, such as José Adrião or João Luis Carrilho da Graça or Inês Lobo, Francisco and Manuel Aires Mateus. It was a very stimulating and critical moment because my work at the studio was different before and after that moment.

Do you feel there was a change?

Yes, I started reflecting differently. And it had a huge impact in terms of the reasoning that you must convey and can objectively be discussed. We end up realizing that design practice in the studio is no different to project teaching practice at the school. The tools are different, but I believe that what is produced with the students is not far from what can be produced in the studio; the wonderful relationships that exist on both sides are relatively different, but I felt that it was truly a chance to do what, somehow, I intuitively did in the studio and that became evident at the school.

Does this mean that we could say that teaching motivated you to research?

Yes, of course. I understand “research” as many things. Academic research is now very linked to the completion of cycles with assessment, grades, etc. Research at the studio can be much more open and freer. And it is this research that leads to something that we do not know well what it will be; and this research can, finally, open almost unfathomable ways of joining pieces that were not yet together, of creating the desire to do research about architects who are completely unknown, of territories that do not yet have a place in the History of Architecture but which, perhaps they should have. Things that are discovered because we have been there and that suddenly arise, and this will conduct research, I believe, was what opened up these hypotheses that I have built in recent years: to design for the triennial, to participate in JA (Jornal Arquitectos), to write about territories I like and that I understand that need to be talked about, the workshops that I now started to organize with the sponsorship of Millennium-BCP Foundation are also something that belongs to the two universes, the studio and the school.

You are now doing your PhD. Can you talk about your research? How did you choose the topic in the context you are talking about?

It simply arose. André Tavares and Diogo Seixas Lopes's invitation to participate in the Universities contest for the Triennale was made at a time when I was already thinking of Sines. We needed to decide on a territory and a topic for the contest. Diogo, André, Marta Labastides and I decided that Sines and its large port, industrial and urban complex, was able to provide an extensive and diverse work experience to all architecture schools in the country. Sines had also been my first topic for my first class at UAL in 2005/2006, when Ricardo Carvalho invited me to give a class to his fifth-year group on History and Theory of the City, I believe. Suddenly, the decision to work on Sines, which had been my first topic for a class, came back. We did super extensive work with all the architecture schools in the country; there were 900 students and two years of research on that territory about something that I had long wanted to do: bring together the pieces of the Office for the Area of Sines, which was created in the early 1970s, disappeared in the late 1980s, and left scattered documents about a vast

industrial installation, about the foundation of a city, the new city of Santo André built for workers, an incredible city built with the contribution of important architects.

Hence the desire to research this period, which I am now resuming - after that first moment of more open, more preparatory work - and which I will try to complete in the next years. Basically, I have always had the idea that it would be important to conclude this thesis, but I felt there would come a time when this would give me joy and not something completely irrelevant that I would just do to attain an academic degree. This joy for this work is much more important.



I am going to risk a theory: You were a student and you started your studio at a time of pre-crisis, and, at this moment, we experience more or less the same kind of euphoria. Is there anything that you bring from that experience to your students? Is there a relationship between universities and the real world?

Higher education, or university education, is important to gain consistency and references so that your work - whatever it may be can have much more meaning and much more interest than what is imposed by the labour market. One of the things I really like to refer to students is that the future will come. If they wanted to do a degree whose relationship with the market was immediate, direct and fast, there are many such degrees. I think that teaching and learning architecture is much closer to what you would

call classical degrees, in which you can learn about culture, you are confronted with classical culture. That is the case of history, philosophy, music or literature. These are fundamental bases to react to guide a career path and therefore, I cannot even define whether it is more difficult to start a studio now or in the 1990s or 2000s. I think that teaching, as I know it today, is much better than many years ago. There is more choice, there is more critical mass, there is more exchange between teachers and schools, and there are many teachers, there are very different teachers and there are also quite different teaching methods.

I also started teaching in Évora in 2012, and I found the students very different from the ones in Lisbon - and that was very beautiful and stimulating. In Lisbon, we have, at Autónoma, students who are from around here, from Cascais, Sintra, from the south bank of the Tagus... In Évora, I had students from all over the country, many from the Algarve, Leiria, Castelo Branco, Minho, Trás-os-Montes... and they were really different people, either because the father still made olive oil, or because of something else... this would lead to things that students in Lisbon do not know. Any project that you design, guide and consolidate has different people involved.

But now, at Autónoma, you have many more international students; this year, for example, in the second year you have a very different class from those so far.

This is perhaps the greatest change that Autónoma has undergone in recent years. Maybe 50% of students today are international. But in Évora too, twenty of my fourth-year students are Portuguese, and twenty are international, from Timor, from Latin America... But in relation to the difficulty of having a job, having a studio or producing work today, I frankly think that today I have better jobs in the studio, but I do not have many more than those I had during the several crises. Maybe the jobs are a little better because we also learn to manage our work differently. Finally, this decision to be a teacher was also a choice not to become a hostage to the labour market. Today, I am also aware of that, of being able, in some way, to partly choose what I do in the studio. It is not that I have refused a lot of jobs, but I am also aware that I do not want to do everything. There are things that interest me more than others, both from the pedagogical point of view and from the point of view of the studio.

The relationship between the studio and the school, for me, in the last four or five years, gained other proportions because one day I decided I would try to have employees who had been my students. Up to a point in time I thought it was not clear that it would be better, nor that anything would be gained by it. I tried it, and the truth is that it is great. It is great for two reasons: because it seems that half of the conversation has already been carried out, it seems that there has already been an introduction that is not worth rewriting, and because, effectively, the work elements and the pieces that I like to work in the studio are not different from those that I like to do at school.

And, of course, nothing is very different; the deadlines are tighter, the steps are different, but it is not very different. Today I have former Autónoma and Évora students in the studio, sometimes more from Autónoma, sometimes more from Évora. It all started at a time when I created a contest and got people from both schools to work together, and it

was great for everyone, it was funny and helpful, I think, and from then on, I kept doing the same.

You have participated in JA and also write regularly. How do you see the decline in architecture publications in recent years? Do you think this is directly related to some lack of debate?

I think so, I think it is very worrying. Our generation was used reading large magazines that were part of our learning. 2G and El Croquis, Casabella, were magazines that brought the world of architecture to everyone, and the national magazines as well; JA, above all, was always a journal where several generations of important architects of our architectural culture shared their production and discussed architecture.

It is very worrying that today, frankly, there are no newspapers or magazines organised by different groups and different people to discuss what is happening. JA, which I know, is practically an internal magazine of the Portuguese Architecture Association. The last editorial board, just before this phase, with Diogo Seixas Lopes and André Tavares, in which I participated, imprinted a beautiful radicality with a group of architects/writers that also included photographers Valter Vinagre, Nuno Cera and André Cepeda. The radical perspective maintained the continuity with the previous boards by Manuel Graça Dias and Ana Vaz Milheiro and the one before, by José Adrião and Ricardo Carvalho, who were very clear in their proposal to force the discussion in specific terms and with those people. Some issues had topics, a word, or a design to be researched, and that gave origin to great discussions. We received JA in the studio, and there was always a day that was almost reserved for understanding what was there, what was important to discuss, if we were against or in favour of what was stated, and if we wanted to follow that path or not. I remember great discussions with Fernando Martins and Paulo Fonseca (dear friend and architect with whom I worked, already deceased).

Today, I witnessed little discussion among our students. First, they read very little, it is a scary thing. But that is the time; we must get there another way... but for us, as producers of architecture, the hyper concentration in work, without reflection, is something that we cannot agree with, it cannot be. I think this represents a huge loss in this aspect. And in the world of general-knowledge publications, can architecture find its place in this world? Not really, right? We know that its place is really small, that is scary. Even with great architects who have already tried it – led by Manuel Graça Dias, who, for a long time, tried this open discussion approach – it was very difficult... João Luis Carrilho da Graça and Gonçalo Byrne, who are very engaged and who intervene in public topics, find it very hard to do so in general newspapers and magazines.

And what can we do? The only solution is to have our own space, in a magazine for architects, at least that should exist. I think there are people very interested in writing; there are people very interested in disseminating architecture, and there are people very interested in doing architecture focusing on architectural culture rather than on projects. And I think this is an advantage. What is truly different in academia is that today our students are aware that they can do architecture in many ways, and that does not hinder their life as architects.

And anywhere in the world.

I think our learning process was different. You either were an architect who had a studio and designed projects and built or you worked for the City Hall, and that is level B, a plan for those who were not good enough to have a studio... Today, our students come from many places, and they know much more. Then, truly, they know little about architecture, but I also knew very little about it; I do not think this is a problem for students.



Nowadays, as architects, we are exposed to a much wider world, and much more constructive and design heterogeneity than we have ever been. Do you think this is seen in construction?

I don't think the two are directly related. First of all, I think we work a lot, we have many ideas for events that are not built for their initial purpose, and this is a huge loss – for society in general, for our collective life and the public space. What I mean is that incredible work is being carried out in each studio, super valuable works for society and for everyone, but that they are not implemented, they are not built, and they will remain gathering dust somewhere where someone will someday discover them.

This is a serious issue, the project leaves the studio, gets to the working site and is changed, and we have to be there to endure that change; this is a process - and I really like this process, I really like to get to the site and have that “bone structure”, and be

there to support it, and to hold it and change it a little, or change it a lot, either way, it sometimes gets completed. Or, as it happened to me recently, it is a disaster. And how can this disaster be part of your journey, how do you move on?... You just keep trying, you keep on building, you try to do better, be clearer in your reasoning, be clearer with the project, so that it will be less taken away and changed. But this should be known because this happens to everyone. In all the studios there are designs to which this has happened, from those by architect Siza to those by an architect who has just left school. And this should be written about, discussed, and presented somewhere so that at least people know and talk about it. In Mercado do Bairro das Pedras, which I have just built, and which I saw being changed to my disappointment, people come to me and ask: "Was it not supposed to be like this?"

On top of that, there was public voting on that project, wasn't there?

Well, that process was absolutely unbelievable! There was a public budget, there was public discussion on that budget and the submission of applications, there was a choice, a decision by public voting, there was a project approved by the City Hall, there was an approved budget, there was a public construction contest, and suddenly, even with all this, we get to the stage of building and things get changed! And people ask: wasn't it supposed to be this way? And many people do not understand that even if the project has an author, has been chosen and has a budget, everything can still go wrong because any political decision-maker just likes it differently! And most people don't know this, they think that if the project is designed one way, then why wasn't it built according to the project? Only by the reactions I have had lately have I realized that people think this is linear: If it is validated if it is paid if there is the money to build it, why is it not built as it should be?

João Santa Rita spoke about *whatever*, when there is a time when it seems that it does not matter, it is *whatever*...

Yeah, it seems whatever, and that should be known, it should be written about, maybe we have to think better about it; I think that even more important than the setback is communication: "Look, that's how things are done." It cannot be a personal claim; it must be a public matter, it must be a matter of discussion, what is happening, how different areas intersect - that is what I think is truly important. Because we could all write some articles from time to time saying "Oh, they treated me badly, they did me wrong, I don't like it..." But that's not the question; I don't feel like writing an article about that because that's not the question. The question is Bairro das Estacas, which should be a classified heritage and is not, whose public space is damaged, is disturbed, and that is something more complicated. You want to have arguments for new construction within a neighbourhood of Portuguese architectural culture, the best implantation, geometry and details, and the extension of an original idea of continuity of the gardens. That was also why I called it Mercado-Jardim (Market-Garden): the crossing joins the market with the garden. Well, they liked the name very much, but there is no garden: Cars park on top of the market. And they added some horrible grids to definitely break one of the great assets of the project: the physical and visual continuity of the market.



Just yesterday, I was talking with Ines Lobo about Martim Moniz, and I mentioned that people withdraw from discussing the city, the architects

first of all, but everyone is doing it... we were talking about what has been done in Lisbon and the fact that people have the feeling that things are better, that spaces have improved. But we continue not having this discussion.

Absolutely. I think that in situ/, which they do here at CEACTION/UAL, is great. It is less permeable because it is very academic. When I invented these new architecture laboratories (with Paulo David and Joao Gomes da Silva, in Funchal, and I just did another one in Beja with Manuel Faião and Ricardo Bak Gordon and Ana Vaz Milheiro), one of the things we discussed a lot was how an exercise done by architects and for a certain place can be seen and observed by other people who also think about the public area: historians, engineers, geographers and so on. And one of the things that was very beautiful in Funchal when we did the first laboratory was having several people visiting. Every day, there was a conference, and every day, there was an open class for the city. And everyone we invited to be there ended up bringing other people who were curious about what was happening there, and most of them were absolutely unaware of how architects work. They had no idea about what an architecture exercise on a place, on a building, entails. And that is a surprise, on the one hand, of course, but it is something that we must be able to change. In my latest laboratory, in Beja, the work was on Bairro dos Alemães – which I am now dealing with, to write a small book on that territory, so that it can be part of Portuguese Architecture History. We started by collecting pieces, we asked the City Hall to search in its archive, and we asked the Air Force the same thing. The students visited these sites and started organizing the processes with all the pieces that they could include in a project process; we also had open classes and were visited by people who went to our classes to know how that work could be carried out. Because there is this idea of the author, some drawings, some construction, and the City Hall then says its piece. Many people still do not know how a project is designed, and these laboratories have tried to convey that information. And produce documents that last.

Our challenge (as /in situ organisation) is always construction. Students have to face the process of turning a project into reality when there are limitations, which, in this case, are time, materials, labour, and their strength to do things....

I was listening to you and thinking I need to mention one or two people who have been very important to me in recent years: Fernanda Fragateiro and Marta Labastida. With Fernanda Fragateiro, I learned to see construction from the artists' perspective: from project to execution, there is more freedom, which I envy. In fact, it is not absolute freedom, of course, as we know, but they do not have our constraints - with the program, with the client, with the typology, with the organisation, with the foundations of what we are doing, that are architecture features, perhaps unmatched. The number of things that come together to create another thing, the people who build it, is very difficult to find a more or equally complex field as architecture. This leads me to conclude that it is a miracle when you see something well-designed, with an absolutely clear idea, with well-defined and well-decided relationships! It's almost a miracle, we think everything is possible, but that is something really hard! With Fernanda, to conclude, I learned that

most of all, and I learned that, in the greatest difficulties, everything can be done with respect and elegance, and you must keep on fighting!

I must also mention Marta Labastida, who I met at JA, where we worked together, and then also in triennial, where we were joined by André and Diogo. She has worked in areas that interest me a lot, such as public space, she worked with Sola-Morales and is used to discussing public space. With Marta I am working on other things, on how design can be more material than thought, and even, often, it can faster reach construction and be less stuck on design.

You are very strict in terms of written and oral skills, which has to do with clarity of thought. That is something I think a lot about, especially in the face of internationalisation because language defines our thought and how we express what we want. I believe that focusing on clarity of thought is a conscious choice. And I wanted to know if that is true, if that is something you have worked on.

I think it is very important and stimulating in terms of pedagogy, even for students, to decide how this or that is mentioned, how we can convey either what we are thinking or what we are building in a better or worse way. Now I have built two exercises, which I enjoy more and more. This began when, five years ago, I started teaching with Joao Santa Rita at Autónoma. Usually, I am with Ricardo Carvalho in the first semester and with João Santa Rita in the second; in Évora, with Pedro Pacheco. I have also taught with Daniel Jimenez, João Soares and João Matos, José Adrião, Sofia Salema. They are different people, and we use different methods, but there was something that could be shared - when doing an exercise, producing a visual and a written text. And the written text has to say, to translate, exactly, in words, what is drawn, as if it were a thorough description. And this is a difficult exercise, it requires attention and thought. It requires rewriting.

And the other thing I find important, I have thought of it as increasingly important, is to organise the method we use to design a project. You define crucial stages, that is, what the document is for, its scale, the pencil, the reasoning, and why it has to be that, it has to be that way. And for what? For nothing, it is an instrument! Later, you realise what it is for, it does not have an immediate value as construction. This has led to interesting things - that is your task and it has to be done right. That piece was well-designed; soon, you have ten well-designed pieces and the project is completed! And the narrative is built on that.

In our ever-changing world, at least in technological terms, what are the tools that you choose as essential for architecture to continue as a field of knowledge?

This morning, I was reading the newspaper, and there was a small text about the performance concert that Laurie Anderson gave last week in Lisbon. The text said that there was a time when all her objects, all her small world, all her pieces were stored in a basement, and there was a flood in New York, and all her things were ruined, she was left with nothing. And she had to rethink her world without her things. The text concluded

by saying that the memory of things and the word that records the memory of things, the text about the things that build their memory, is much more important than the things themselves. And that is what can be conveyed, and that is what can eventually be continued by someone. That was disturbing.

I confess that the material world seduces me much more than the immaterial world, I am a collector of things, and things are important to me! When I write, I must have twenty books around me; when I design, I must have photographs of the buildings I like, I need that to start something. I feel that when they say that the world is like this nowadays, or that the difficulty today is this, it is because something else is already happening. Our words, what we can say, have already been crushed by the thought-crushing political service. And in this situation, we must leave words behind: you must not use them, from the moment they are included in political speeches.

One year I designed a proposal for participatory budgeting with some friends: to use some of the city's patios for specific public use. The proposal appeared in the ballot as "The use of patio spaces for parking lots, gardens, children's playground", as a package, as part of the same idea. This is the greatest tragedy of Portuguese political culture. As a rule, they cannot differentiate between a masterpiece and an ordinary design. And therefore, everything is always closer to a disaster. In fact, I feel that happens every day.

Another thing I read recently that seduces me a lot and that I like to reproduce from time to time, was about D. Antonia, the founder of Ferreirinha Port wine, who said a short time ago in an interview: "Well, but that's hard, making a wine is a complex thing, there are many variables. This is really difficult, but the first 250 years are the most difficult, those are really hard. After that, things are almost fine."!

To think of a time that is endless is crucial for your actions. I believe that this is an important sense for the concept of politics and what is public. So, which instruments do I think will remain? I don't know. But of course, the word and the text will remain hugely important.