

In continuum: Interview with João Nunes [1]

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To cite this article: LOBO, Inês; JUDAS, Miguel (coords) et al – *In continuum: Interview with João Nunes*. **Estudo Prévio** 28. Lisboa: CEAUT/UAL - Centro de Estudos de Arquitectura, Cidade e Território da Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, June 2026, p. 158-169. ISSN: 2182-4339 [Disponível em: www.estudoprevio.net]. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26619/2182-4339/28.8>

Received on January 9, 2026 and accepted for publication on March 11, 2026.

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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

Thank you very much, João, for being available to share some of your ideas with us. In class, we gathered a series of questions on various topics that interest us. The first one is about the city. In a text written in 2003, Jacques Herzog says: “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?

This is not quite a question; it is a very questionable statement, with which I am not in agreement at various instances. I do not, first of all, agree with the idea of getting rid of manifestos and theories. Not only are there many theories about the city, but some really help us to understand what the city is. The first important idea is what the city represents as an abstract place.

I am very connected to the rural world and know what it means to produce things like wool balls, litres of milk, olives, lambs, and interact with the market - interacting with the market means looking for a platform between producers and buyers who will transform these raw materials into fabrics, cheese, olive oil, etc. And, more than the place for production, the city is the place of meeting and exchange - it is a kind of great fair that works, first of all, on surpluses. If there is no agriculture with sufficient productive capacity to create surpluses, we cannot exchange products; we do not have a market; we do not seek this meeting platform; and there are no conditions for the city. Therefore, everything hinges on our ability to produce raw materials and surpluses, which frees us from the burden of daily self-sufficiency and allows us to occupy this place of exchange.

I believe this is the first theory about the city - it is a meeting - and it is an interesting theory that not only locates it spatially, which is already something that immediately derives from this reasoning, but also allows us to understand the city as being deeply complementary to other things.

It is not an object, it is a relationship, a fabric of relationships, a product of relationships - if there are no such relationships, there is no city. The confusion between the city-relationship and the city-object is a very contemporary issue, and the need to theorise about the city arises from the need not to forget this difference. We can theorise about the city object without a doubt - “How do you understand something that must physically and materially manage and coordinate these relationships?” but that is not the theory of the city, in my opinion. The theory of the city derives from questioning, for example, how to relate density issues to the occupation of valleys (a problem that arises in cities without a harbour) and from understanding the city as part of a much wider system, which I call landscape. Therefore, I completely reject the idea that there is no theory of the city. There is a theory of the city and a theory of the landscape, and these theories help us produce models of the city.

Fortunately, we have many models of city operation, some more basic - where producers meet with producers, and producers with consumers - that allows us not only to perceive the city as a node of a large system called landscape but also understand what financing



strategies exist in various landscapes - by buying local bread and olive oil I am financing a landscape, by buying packaged bread and butter I am financing another - and this is directly related to this model, in a kind of large nodes that are the cities. Then there are very complex models related to dynamics, flows, mobility, water drainage, soil and soil occupation, etc. The models of city operation from the point of view of drainage, for example, are lacking, namely, to understand that extreme weather phenomena are not something exceptional or unpredictable; quite the opposite. And we need to take steps to prevent the most catastrophic aspects of these phenomena from happening again.

I think you have already partly answered the question of our next topic, entangled life. In one of his writings, Paulo Mendes da Rocha refers to the idea of “urban” 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 is urbanism. 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? What is the role of nature in the city?

The sentence “urban is nothing” is not true. The urban makes a larger system work. And I understand this idea that the city is our plot, it is a kind of script, but that has to do with relationships. These are the ones which write the city, describe it and build it and this image is beautiful... the idea of a generous model of the city’s design, as was the case of architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha [model]... the idea that the plot is made in an attempt to build trust, solidarity and hope that there may be a fair way to write and draw this narrative. I believe that humans spend most of their time in designed spaces. From the moment humans began to transform the world around them, planting and sowing the first seeds, cutting forests, creating the first signs of anthropisation, they were already carving out space to live in, and this is our destiny; it is what we know how to do.

In fact, we cannot live in the wild and survive in spaces that are not transformed into anything habitable, because we are so fragile that, if we are subjected to the real conditions of the wild, we die of cold, extreme heat, solar radiation, hunger, or are eaten by other animals, and we are unable to defend ourselves.

Therefore, I do not agree with the rather radical idea that humans are either part of nature or part of something that runs counter to it. Humans are part of nature, of course, but they try to build a replacement nature, one that is more favourable to them, to survive in it. And how is this nature changed? Through two instruments: manufacture, through the assembly of raw materials and dispersed materials, we make huts, iPhones, cars, bonfires; we build artefacts that are, at the outset, condemned to be sent to a garbage condition when their main function becomes obsolete. The paintings by Ines [Lobo] and Miguel [Judas] are not garbage because they can build a relationship of affection with the people around them. This pen will be trash, or it would be trash if I didn’t like it so much. The only way we can rescue artefacts from becoming garbage is



to engage emotionally with them, whether they are works of art, houses, pens or even iPhones. Some people collect old iPhones, which is inexplicable, but that actually happens. And therefore, we are always producing garbage or rescuing what we love from garbage. The difficulty lies in the fact that things can be loved.

There is another process of producing artefacts: domestication, through the continuous transformation of the original so that it meets our conveniences, or even to specialise their purpose, as we do with cows - dairy cows or meat cows - or with dogs - guard dogs, shepherd dogs or companion dogs. When we do this, we are actually creating artefacts. Still, they are quite different from the first, because they do not have a point zero - a pen has a zero moment, the moment of creation - with domesticated animals, this does not happen, there is no point zero in the creation of a breed - its original condition is changed. And this happens with everything we relate to this spirit of domestication - not only animals and plants, but also terraces in the mountains, dikes in the rivers, drainage operations in the soils. The great transformations in the landscape are made to domesticate and end up with something so artificial that, like us, it becomes completely unable to relate to its original nature. If we abandon a Yorkshire terrier in a forest, it will not survive; it depends on humans. This is key to everything. We take freedom and autonomy away from these plants and animals, but we give them something in return - longer and healthier lives, as well as the absence of suffering and stress from having to seek food. The average life expectancy of wild wolves, for example, the ancestors of our dogs, is 5 years, and we have created a dog that lives 15 years. Another example is wheat, lost among so many other grains 25 years ago, and that, currently, is the most common species on the surface of the globe, just because it signed a pact with us - lose autonomy and grow. This pact is our cultural burden.

Domestication is our contract; we are born with this responsibility that is fundamentally related to affection, healing, treating and maintaining. We cannot reject this. When humans think, "This puppy is very cute, I want the puppy, then I no longer want the puppy, I abandon the puppy", it is a terrible thing, but we do that with landscapes too. We treat them, we heal them, while they are directly useful to us because of hunger. We graze, or we build terraces, we produce olive groves and vineyards, and then, suddenly, when we realise that we earn more money doing business in the stock market or renting rooms, we forget that. We have started buying olives from Morocco and oranges from Algeria, and our landscape is being transformed by their abandonment. In domestication, abandonment does not mean returning to the original condition, because this is evidently impossible; it means a kind of limbo in which systems and living beings that are no longer domesticated and cannot return to their original condition become something new.

I believe that these are the two instruments of landscape construction and design and that there are not many square meters of floor in the world that are not, in one way or another, altered by humans. Even when we consider and define a space that has remained untouched, this demarcation is already a form of domestication. Assigning it a specific meaning and proposing a particular management system evidently transforms it into a domesticated space. All those lion and rhino reserves we see on television documentaries are a kind of large-scale farm where we learn to manage the last stage of domestication: the wild.

In relation to this statement, the big difference, in my opinion, is that we have not started spending most of our lives in designed spaces... We have always lived in designed spaces; we are designed spaces. It is difficult to separate us from the designed spaces

we live in and to separate the designed spaces from us. It is more than a habitat; it is a kind of cocoon, a capsule that is part of our behaviour. In this regard, I think that this border between “nature” and “not nature” is an irrelevant subject. In fact, that is not the issue; the issue is how we can domesticate. How can we ethically domesticate? With what intentions? What consequences? What impact? What meaning can we assign to the future spaces of our lives?

The following theme is also related to the city, but more directed to the question of the right to the city and to housing. 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 has 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? Is the right to the city the architect's duty, more than that of common citizens?

The right to the city is universal, as is the right to the countryside. What I think we should talk about is the right to the life and the activities we choose. The city is not a right; it is an option, an option that is increasingly not necessarily universal. Currently, even if we do not consider the abstract and theoretical phenomena of ruralization, we observe, even in the invisible hands of the market, a clear option for different ways of life. Leaving the city, living in the countryside, raising chickens, enhancing pigeon species, for example, having other activities besides your main activity - these are only possible because you live in the countryside and not in the city. The right to live as you want is our greatest freedom; that is the right we must defend. We want the city, yes, we defend the right to the city. We do not want the city; we defend the right to not live in the city, but in a place that is as constructive, safe, and effective as the city. There are still many places in the world, unfortunately, where, in making this choice, people also opt between having a hospital 20 minutes away or running the risk of their child dying on their way to the hospital with appendicitis.

Should defending freedom of choice be the architects' duty? Surely yes, this is the architect's duty. Most architects in the architectural literature are extremely solidarity-oriented and advocate for the rights and freedoms of their fellow citizens. However, at the first opportunity, they cling to economic power and become the most subservient and vile slaves of what they previously defended. I know so many cases that it bothers me to think about it. What needs to be solved, first of all, is people's thinking that what matters is their place in the rat race and, above all, within the spectacle of architecture. A great training effort must be invested through example, because it is not possible to encourage an extremely critical attitude toward the work of architects and the role they must play in the struggle for the right to the city and as defenders of these freedoms if they then sign highly speculative projects. Therefore, architecture students are and have to be critical enough to understand the positions each architect takes beyond the spectacle of their architectural results. Just as they should be critical of their own spectacle and realise what it evidences, what their real efforts were, what the production that was achieved in relation to defending these rights was, even if it is conceptual.

I believe that if you start to analyse your references' work from this point of view, you will be in for a bitter surprise, a lot of disappointments, but it is a very important task. Accepting that defending the right to the city is the architect's duty, I wonder whether this is a role that they must take on more seriously, or whether all citizens should take it on?

Architects have a huge responsibility because they can succumb to power and economic influence and deliver spectacular experiences, but I do not think it is justifiable. We could say that, from the point of view of research and the construction of an architectural body, to make or have the opportunity to make 50 spectacular objects in architecture is worth selling your soul to the devil. Yet, I think it is not worth it, above all because I do not believe in the true value of spectacular objects. Not only because the trade-off is bad, but also because what we trade off for our souls are irrelevant things. If we look at the spectacular architecture of 40 years ago, the magnificent 80s, in light of what you (students of architecture) think, I ask you: What is the spectacular architecture of the 80s? Indeed, the spectacular architecture of the 80s, which amazed your colleagues, was precisely produced by your colleagues' teachers with that very same intention. I am convinced that spectacularity is not a value and that, therefore, "selling your soul" to test spectacularity is not worth anything.

Speaking about common ground and sharing, 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 public space a tool of social cohesion?

Of course, public space is the place for tools of social cohesion; it is the box where these tools can work. However, public space is a very broad concept, and I believe that the fact that it is a tool for social cohesion has very little to do with Doris Salcedo. Doris Salcedo intervenes in very specific ways and in contexts that, fortunately, have little to do with our city. But what we must realise is that this is not a space for interaction between the elected and the population, it is a space for interaction among the population itself, and this interaction is not necessarily less rich than the interaction stimulated by a kind of crack. In other words, we do not need artists who teach us how public spaces can be extraordinary tools of social cohesion, because people, especially today, know how to transform public spaces into places and spaces for building social cohesion.

We are working in the park in Marvila, and the way communities are following the process evidences their ability to do it autonomously, without animators or facilitators. They are gathered in associations, in small platforms, in neighbourhood communities, in groups of artists, in street groups, in musical bands. We greatly underestimate people's ability to generate these energies towards social cohesion. We pay them very little attention.

Perhaps, we should create space for the visibility of spectacular architecture and give it to these community initiatives, because they are very valid. I have contacted not only in Portugal with communities that are, effectively, of an unbelievable wealth, and are not specialists; they are amateurs in everything - in theatre, in music, in fine arts, in graffiti. But public space is much more than squares and streets. Public space is the entire space of the infrastructure; it is the train lines, the margins and the protective strips of the train lines. It is the water limits, the maritime public areas, and the spaces for large infrastructures, road services to large farms in Alentejo that allow us to drive and see the Guadiana River. Farming operations often cut off these paths; they are maintained at great effort and in a small number. This is a very special, very important network, and we do not consider it properly either.

From an abstract point of view, to say that you can go on foot or by bike from Lisbon to Moscow is extremely important. Not now, taking into account what is going on, but in abstract terms, only considering the distance and complexity of the territory travelled, this is an extraordinary idea. I mention Moscow, but we could also talk about travelling by water to Venice, using the vast public spaces, which are the sea, the rivers, and the lagoons. To understand this freedom means to understand that it can be lost when the sea and these reserve spaces of the last strongholds, of the common sense of space, are lost. And I say “when” because I think it is just a matter of time. If we look at the maps of the ocean concessions, we get shivers; only some sort of roads are left. Between telecommunications, fisheries, mining and oil concessions, the number of private farms or concessions at sea is absolutely unbelievable. And, as happened on land, where there were huge expanses of community pastures, the wastelands, almost all converted into private structures or municipal private areas, the same will eventually happen at sea. The defence of public space as something that transcends the city and extends to enable connections among different world cities is crucial.

Our next topic is about inhabiting. 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?

I believe that in many ways. If we think about Suburra, the great urban chaos of the poor Roman city, where the insulae, 4 or 5 storey buildings, rented according to the different social classes of Suburra, with different densities of use, somewhat like here, where there were houses for different family; one floor for one family; but several families also inhabited houses and, in the densest and poorest places in Suburra, there were even spaces where each compartment housed a large number of people. And this happens today, here, in Lisbon, in the same way.

This speculation and this injustice in the right to housing are not issues created by the industrial revolution, by market liberalisation, or by recent market fever. These are things apparently inherent in a specific understanding of the community and the other, which are as objectionable in contemporary times as they were in Roman times. This means that, 2000 years ago, there were rich people who invested and made fortunes in building construction through market speculation and the exploitation of their fellow citizens' poverty and misery. The frightening thing is that we have done nothing to change this in 2000 years: this attitude, this understanding of the other and making money from the other, and we have not been able to change how we build relationships. Because, in fact, they are the same. If we study Roman life, family issues or social relationship issues related to sexuality, for example, they are completely different from today. However, the practice of exploiting those with less money has survived intact.

Therefore, we should reflect on this, and I really believe that it is the key to solving an unbelievable number of issues. If we changed our relationships with others in general, and with respect to speculation and housing, the world would be much better and very different, indeed. Just as we have examples of speculation, we also have very virtuous examples. I'm remembering Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation – that magnificent idea of having a common floor that belonged to no one and that was a place where people cooked, washed, stayed and talked. This means offering, in speculative terms, the community the space that is profitable in that it can contribute to the well-being of those people. I believe that both things are very much connected. Either we find generous models of living conditions at all levels, public space, private space, housing, and we can understand architecture as guided by ethical parameters and principles, or each square meter serves only for the promoter's profit due to a random opportunity.

Therefore, this is always related to the architect's perspective. Moreover, we see that architects are paid less and less - "the soul is sold for increasingly cheaper prices" - which is a thing that scares me. But this has to do with you. I have a lot of hope in this generation, because it is a generation that craves futile toys less and less, that has other interests, interests that I consider to be more complex. They care about living better and being with other people. They have completely different values from those of the 1980s - think of architect Taveira driving a Ferrari surrounded by girls. For your generation, this is ridiculous; it does not make the slightest sense.

[Ines Lobo]: I wonder if we live in a bubble. The generation that enters university today, the students who attend our courses, are not the common type.

I don't know, I always hope that things will be different, that things are really changing. Just as I hope they will change in architecture. The awards are less and less attributed to spectacular architecture; they highlight the interest in non-spectacular architecture, in ethical architecture, and poor architecture that tries to spend little.

The sixth question is about durability, flexibility and ruin. The book "On and Around Architecture: Ten Conversations," by Jonathan Sergison and Stephen Bates, explores the idea of approaching a collective housing project through 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 into three moments forces us to another way of designing, in which time is once again a fundamental datum in the process - construction time and lifetime. How should we define flexibility in architecture? What is its biggest obstacle?

Jonathan is somewhat optimistic about the structure's universality and stability. Lately, I have been working in Italy a lot, where the country's own seismic risk chart has been transformed, due to a series of earthquakes in areas that were not considered seismic zones, namely throughout Emilia-Romagna. And suddenly, the structure itself is

questioned. A project that involves the renovation of a pre-existing building also implies that the structure is reviewed to include seismic resistance parameters. Therefore, I believe that this is a very interesting reflection, like all reflections that include time as thought in architecture, precisely because it opposes this somewhat naive view of the architect drawing “a sketch” and that “sketch” becoming the building that would last forever. And when they asked them about the building's lifespan, they were completely bewildered, because that was not even a question.

When we look at photo albums, what happens? The album begins to age immediately - it is still brand new and is already ageing. A building's life begins the moment the key is given to the renter, and this is visible in several different ways: the ageing of materials, the difference in resistance of materials to the environment, the changes to the design, and the changes because of the taste of the owner's wife, who changes the curtains and furniture. All of this pulls away from this idea of eternity and becomes much more dynamic, perhaps more interesting, as it continuously generates different problems every day of the building site's life. This thought has to involve the possibilities of drifting away from the original design and establish the principles of this drifting - to understand the permanent and the transitory, the permanent and the rejectable. This is discussed in so many commissions...

For example, when designing a park, the architectural arguments that will be visible at the time of the inauguration are very few, the elements built - the floors, the walls, the lamps, the furniture, the topography - what effectively constitutes the architectural space of a park or a garden in thirty years' time are the large canopies, the changes in colour, the changes in transparency, the changes in light, the relations between the various canopies. It is another architecture that will develop autonomously. We have to consider the design reasoning as carefully as others and include in our design what we already know it will become, i.e., a different spatial condition. It is not exactly flexibility; it is a kind of project at different times.

You cannot control the future, but you can understand the openness and the relations between the permanent and temporary in this particular space. This is more complex than applying these ideas to both the skeleton and the non-skeleton of a building, because it depends on the type of building. This has been done for many years. Nowadays, there are university campuses that were hospitals and that were convents. Nova university, in Campo de Santana, is now an institutional campus, with auditoriums and halls; the School of Fine Arts is another example. Lisbon is full of many more elaborate examples than simply saying that the skeleton remains. It is not exactly the skeleton that remains; it is a reasoning in which one can separate what is considered permanent and what can be more temporary, and it is a reasoning that has to exist. Eventually, it already existed. I do not believe it is a coincidence that these buildings, which now serve as excellent university halls, were also excellent medical school rooms and convent rooms. It is not a coincidence.

The next topic is on tradition and industrialisation. 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, and at a time of climate urgency. The present, therefore, seems an opportunity to rethink what it means to build and how to build. This seems to impose changes on everyone involved in the process:

designers, industry and builders. What is your perception of the construction industry today, namely, compared with other moments in history when industrialisation played a leading role?

I must stress that buildings made with concrete are not sources of pollution; they are sources of carbon, they are different things. Carbon is not a polluting agent; carbon dioxide is not a pollutant - carbon dioxide is an active and universal component of our atmosphere. If the atmosphere did not have large quantities of carbon dioxide, we would not have plants, we would not have life on Earth, and we would have nothing. Through photosynthesis, plants decompose molecules of oxygen, carbon dioxide and water and build another complex molecule - consisting of carbon, two oxygen atoms and one hydrogen atom - CO_2H - which is the base molecule of all organic substances. Without carbon dioxide, there is no photosynthesis; without carbon dioxide, there is no crossing from the mineral to the organic world. Carbon dioxide is not a pollutant and is essential to our lives. The only question is its ratio in the atmosphere. Let us not confuse pollution with carbon dioxide production. And what concrete produces is not pollution; it is carbon dioxide. It has no component, does not produce liquid, does not produce toxic gases, and does not produce anything we need to resolve.

I must say that the idea of a construction industry is very strange, especially after seeing Toyota's houses. On the one hand, I realise the need to make the construction process more and more intelligent, but on the other, it scares me that houses may be chosen like cars - "Do you want a Toyota house model 5 or do you prefer a Hyundai model 16?" I like cameras, and I like to assemble and disassemble them. There is a very funny development, more or less around the 1930s, when industrialisation processes changed in the same way as they did with computer systems. Currently, a computer system is so well protected that interaction with it is practically impossible. In the 1980s, when we bought computer systems, we bought things we interacted with. There were magazines, there were mailboxes where money was sent and sent us back small programs - we were continuously programming what we bought to adapt the programs to our reality, to turn them into things closer to our needs. With cameras, it was the same thing - when the cameras were made of wood, people adapted them, bought another lens element, adjusted focal lengths, changed the sizes of the focus glass, etc. There was constant adaptation, handmade with saws, glue, and the like. When we started working with plastics, especially Bakelite cameras, this was over because the Bakelite camera is closed and cannot be turned into a very expensive one. You cannot change lenses; you cannot change anything. If it breaks, you cannot reassemble it, and I don't like that. The same happened with cars; the first cars were deeply adaptable to our needs. Nowadays, everything is closed - we buy a package with which we have to live during its time of use - and that is another issue - durability. Indeed, things are not eternal and adaptable, but they cannot have a period of decay predicted by the manufacturer itself, which is what happens to all manufactured objects today. You buy something with a three-year warranty, and you already know that after four years, it does not work - that is what the warranty means. And this applied to a house makes no sense to me - because one thing is a fan or a camera, but a house is something else. And when we hand over (if we do) the construction of our homes to the industry, we are creating the inevitable condition that our homes will have an absolutely defined expiry time of manufacture. Everything will stop sealing, become non-watertight, and stop working as soon as the warranty period ends. This is good in the sense that it will renew the design... but I doubt it a lot. I live in an 18th-century house, and I think it is super. I wouldn't change it for anything.

Finally, we would like to discuss the role of architecture in society. What is valued among architects, sometimes consensual, does not necessarily correspond to what is valued by an “ordinary person”. So the question arises: What defines good architecture?

Well, I think this is absolutely true. This is one of the problems: closed-loop operation. Architecture is increasingly celebrated among architects; if you do architecture to show architects, it ends up in this vicious circle, in which the relationship with communities has become very distant, abstract, and, above all, very uninteresting for architects. They are not interested in what people think of their architecture. This happens because there are no critics - the colleague is the critic. There are no architectural critics who have studied architectural criticism, hold this position, and are not architects. It is a figure that no longer exists. Interestingly, it still exists in other arts. For better or worse, there they are. Making our colleagues production critics is the worst that can happen – either we sell ourselves, or we are stuck and have to do tit for tat. “I say that you did great and you say that I did great” ... this is very bad, and it is only resolved with independent criticism, which is what the prizes could or should do, and probably, some will even be doing it... I don't know.

More important than defining architecture is defining the process through which architecture can become something closer and more useful for people. If we walk through the city, we realise that most of the bad we see was designed by architects - this is horrific. I want to say that most of the anonymous buildings that I love that make up the city were designed by architects, but I can't do it either. These two things together are terrible and are one of the great responsibilities of this distance. Alvalade, where we are, is an exception - architects designed it, and it is a wonderful neighbourhood, great to live in. But these architects are anonymous; they were neither famous nor concerned with spectacle or visibility. They were interested in building a great collective work and creating a high-quality habitat that people recognise. People do not know the names of the architects who designed these buildings, but they are perfectly aware of the architectural quality of the places where they live, both in buildings and in public spaces. This is what is important - to serve this relationship, not to identify the author. Do you know who designed Jardim da Estrela? You do not know who designed Jardim da Estrela, it does not matter; what matters is that it is a magnificent thing. Perhaps if we replaced the obsession with the author with a collective idea of production, it would not be a bad idea.

There are some definitions of architecture - architecture is the art of designing the space where we live, be it built space, open space, agricultural, forestry, etc. - it is the thought that lies behind the design. I believe the rules of your thinking should be much more inclusive, for example, regarding infrastructure. The infrastructure is still designed with extremely scarce thought on quality of life - they are spaces that are designed as economically profitable and effective. When designing a highway, there is no concern about the comfort of people living next to or under the overpass. All this is resolved as if it were a nuisance that had to be dealt with at the minimum cost and effort. Even from the user's perspective, you have to agree that petrol stations are awful places. Are they not? Compare it with a train station, a magnificent mid-20th-century train station... They are equivalent as architectural spaces, a product related to infrastructure and people, but one is high-quality, and the other is not. There is a lack of architectural thinking in other design and construction processes in the places where we live, a gap that architecture has not yet been able to address. The biggest challenge is perhaps to

convince people that a tunnel cannot be built without architecture, an overpass cannot be built without architecture, a highway cannot be built without architecture, a railway line, a petrol station... and maybe teach architects how to design these things, rather than cathedrals and things like that, as we sometimes see in academic exercises.

Thank you very much.

I should thank you.

Notes

[1] The interview was held by Zoom 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.