

In continuum: Interview with Fernando Viegas [1]

Inês Lobo

ineslobo@ilobo.pt

Architect, teacher at the Department of Architecture of the Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa (DA/UAL). CIEBA – Centro de Investigação e de Estudos em Belas-Artes. CEAUT/UAL – Centro de Estudos de Arquitectura, Cidade e Território da Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, Portugal.

Miguel Judas

m@migueljudas.com

Architect, PhD student at the Department of Architecture of the Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa (DA/UAL).

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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 for sharing your ideas about our field. It will certainly be very useful to us, given your experience in operating in Latin America. The first topic we would like to discuss with you is “city”. We start with a sentence from a text by Jacques Herzog in 2003 that says the following: “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?” Our question is: If we cannot describe our cities from models, how can we operate on them and find the logic for their requalification?

The issue of the manifestos is really interesting because, by their very nature, they are full of certainty. It seems to me that we are living a very different moment. Perhaps what is certain today is that we are at a moment of change. We are in the middle of a whirlwind, in the middle of a crisis, but we still can’t see the light at the end of the tunnel, right? It is a disturbing moment, but at the same time it can be very rich. I think that we are experiencing profound changes and we are historical agents of these social changes, but we still cannot see how they will end. We can think of these moments of crisis as opportunities for reflection. It is difficult to avoid these historical facts.

I remember once, in an interview with the English historian [Eric] Hobsbawm, he said that if we could move away from the Earth and take a panoramic view of history, we would see accelerated urbanisation as the great phenomenon of human change today. It is an interesting issue for us. Looking from a distance allows for the right questions to arise.

[Honoré de] Balzac, in *Human Comedy*, says that the key to all sciences is a question mark. So, from the point of view of systematising what we could imagine as a manifesto within academia, we can ask questions like the one you are asking today. That is the most important thing we can do today.

Hobsbawm's perspective is on another time scale, in which we increasingly know that our city becomes the planet we inhabit. The world became small with Google Earth, allowing virtual tours of any street in any city. It got small, and we know we must take care of this floating asteroid to survive here, right? The discussion about its occupation is crucial. For a few years now, most of the world’s population has lived in cities. I always talk about this with Alvaro Puntoni, a colleague of ours, a professor at *Escola da Cidade* and a great architect. He did some calculations that helped develop spatial reasoning: If we distribute a small portion of land among the 8 billion people who live on the planet and allocate 75 m² to each inhabitant, all would fit within the Iberian Peninsula. Have you ever thought about it this way? It is very puzzling. If we distributed 90m² per person, they would all fit in the state of Texas. From this point of view, redesigning cities, our place, seems very interesting.

Nowadays, data from geographers show that cities occupy 2% of the Earth’s surface while most of the population lives in cities. So, these are things that, as architects and urbanists, as thinkers of cities, we can reflect on, a permanent task of how to occupy this “planetinha” (little planet). In Brazil, we tend to use diminutives, just like Vinicius de

Moraes, from Bossa Nova, perhaps because we know the issue; we create a closer relationship... – at the same time, I do not know what it would be like to be one of the eight billion within the Iberian Peninsula. I think we live in a system that does not want us all together in this way. I think that much of the urban issues concern the social models of segregation we have lived in... we should think a little about this territorial scale to imagine that there are many ways to occupy this territory and live together.

I like to use the example of South America because recent studies can include infrared aerial photos. Archaeologists allow us to understand that South America, to speak of where I am, has two territorial occupation models much earlier than colonisation. The first was a hierarchical society model, where there was a very clear social hierarchy, a pyramid model that, on the Pacific coast, was made with adobe and, in the Andes, was made with stone, given the most available material. This allowed the construction of buildings that became ruins: Incas, Mayans..., but also, before the Incas – the Incas were the end of this process – there were older concentrated, hierarchized occupations using perennial materials.

On the other hand, the Amazonian civilisation – which we now know was a vast network of occupation, and I do not know if we can name them cities. But today we can see how inhabiting a forest requires management and construction. All the construction of water networks, of soil exchange, on fertile, black soil, which was a culture of construction, i.e., a forest built that was nature, but that, on the arrival of Europeans in America, was already absolutely occupied and built in another form of social organisation, less hierarchical and much more collective, collectivist. They used the available materials – wood, straw, earth... that formed another architecture, different from the perennial architecture of the stone pyramids, but with a cyclical logic of reinventing itself from time to time. These cities, villages, occupations that spread through the territory and established a network of collecting, hunting and transforming trees – we don't know what name to give it – is a city? Not a city? So, it seems to me that we will spend our whole lives trying to define the concept of the city ... the occupation models, the city models are open; maybe this is humans' permanent task – to build cities, reinvent models - because they are not the same. They evidence our social organisation.

The next topic is “entangled life”. It calls for sharing, interconnection, and relationships 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? What is the role of nature in the city?

That is a beautiful sentence by Paulo [Mendes da Rocha]. ... the concept that urban is our invention is very beautiful. Paulo has always summoned us to assume our destiny as a project, as responsibility... somewhat like [Giulio Carlo] Argan. The project as a destination; our future is a construction, a responsibility, all the history we carry with us. Currently, the eight billion have to carry the past on their backs and think about the future. It is a beautiful convocation, a little existentialist, the city as the place where one takes care of the other, the place where we want to be together.

The architect is a small part of this much larger social construction that is everyone's. We have an important role, a social role. I like to imagine that architecture is also never ready, like the city; that architecture could incorporate this temporality, which is our everlasting work, and that a city's identity is built from the values we attribute to it and our memory.

Paulo used many beautiful images in his speeches. I will tell you a little story; we have lots of stories with him. Inês [Lobo] should know this, but I will tell it to you as if it were a secret. Paul was one of these brave men. You need to be brave if you want to be an architect; you must know that by now. There came a guy with a lot of money; I think he was a lawyer, and he said «I want to have a project by Paulo Mendes da Rocha», called his office and said «I bought a huge apartment in a penthouse here in a high-end neighbourhood of São Paulo, and I want a project designed by you. Can we meet?» And Paul said: «This week I'm very busy. I don't know if I can," "But, architect, I want to hire you," and Paulo replied: «Look, tomorrow afternoon I will be at a bar, where I always go in the afternoon. Don't you want to meet me at this bar?» The guy replied: «But weren't you busy?», «This bar is very important for me; I always go there.» «Good, so we meet at the bar.» [Laughter] The guy got to the bar and they drank whiskey after whiskey, talked about life, and after one hour, the guy said – «Well, architect, I came for a meeting, to talk about this refurbishing i want you to do. I have a penthouse... I wanted to change this penthouse into a reception room. And I have works of art...», and Paul asked, «Is it a penthouse in this neighbourhood? Does it have a beautiful view? Is it a 360° view?» and then he added, "Do you want me to design a project for you?", "I really do, architect", the guy replied, and Paulo said, «If I were you, I would do the following: I would plant a mango tree right in the middle of the penthouse, and wait for it to grow, put a bench underneath, and enjoy the view of the city. That is what I would do,". The guy was like: «But is that your project?» And Paulo answered, «Yes, if you want to have a project designed by me, plant a mango tree and sit under it.» [Laughter] This story shows the architect's bravery and also the beautiful concept that the city is our habitat, much more than the artefact you live in. I believe that is what Paul meant about building the shade. You have an urban life in the city, and I think this was Paulo's concept of architecture. Everything in the city is our invention. We invented the street, did we not? The streets were made for people to walk, ride on horseback, drive a car... we have some interesting examples here in São Paulo - a very simple project that changed the spaces we call avenues or overpasses. Here in São Paulo, there is an overpass we call Minhocão. It was built during the military dictatorship quite randomly. It cut the city in half and, at a certain point, due to popular pressure, it changed completely. Because it is high off the ground, cars drive in front of the houses' windows. That pollution is off the roof... the people who lived around it began to demand that this overpass be closed to cars at night. The popular pressure was so strong that it closes every day from eight in the evening to six in the morning. Then people began to complain that they could not stay at home on weekends because of it, so now it also closes on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays.

Thus, this large elevated free space, the overpass, has become a place to party; it has no architectural design, no trees, and it is a really popular space for people to ride their bikes, jog, sunbathe, party, do theatre, everything... And now we don't know if we call it an overpass, a street, an avenue, or a park. It is everything. This shows that we attribute names to things.

Paulista Avenue, a city symbol, is also closed to cars on Sundays. We have no beach in São Paulo. People will wear their bathing suit or bikini and sunbathe, sing, and dance in



a place that is an avenue during the week and a beach on the weekend. So, it's nice to think that this city is being reinvented; even the names given to things may be different from what we expect. Defining nature and culture is increasingly difficult; what was considered a classical difference is no longer true— if we are nature, how can we separate what is made by us from what is ours?

So, just as I said before, from the historian's perspective, the idea that we can move away a little bit to try to see what is happening - I love to hear geologists speaking about millions of years ... this rock [Planet Earth] has been settled for millions of years. They provide a different perspective on time, helping us become a little more attentive and understand how we fundamentally depend on science to continue together.

We are causing significant harm by failing to understand these natural dynamics. At the same time, we can only be together, 8 billion, due to the scientific advances we have made, isn't it? Just as I wanted to answer this question of the city as a social question, I find all that has been said about sustainability interesting when we discuss human impacts on nature. What I think is absolutely unsustainable is poverty. I mention this to expand on our social responsibilities in light of this model of unbridled consumption, which is unfeasible. These classifications are difficult, but the famous geographer Mike Davis says that 70% of people worldwide live in inadequate housing. Here in Brazil, they are called favelas. Many people dislike this translation because it is inaccurate. Davis also meant that those who live in a very precarious situation understand nature in a very different way from those who live in comfort.

Every torrential rain that breaks into your home is a natural disaster that deeply affects you. Recent earthquakes in Mexico City have reached many more people who do not have money. These natural disasters reveal the unsustainability of the social system. Recently, in Brazil, which has faced brutal industrialisation over the last century, we have experienced several disasters. For example, recent mining barriers have broken and contaminated Doce River, turning it into toxic mud and killing it. Imagine a 700 km river that sustained many riverside communities and was utterly contaminated by brutal infrastructure work that failed to account for its natural dynamics. Or all these oil leaks that killed a large part of the fauna of the Brazilian coast, or the fires in the Amazon associated with an absolutely delayed livestock system, so that soybeans are exported to the other side of the world, China. What a waste of energy. Brazil is one of the world's largest food producers, yet 30 million Brazilians are hungry today. Hunger in the 21st century. We have a huge responsibility for any of these major interventions.

The pandemic is an important moment; there is no consensus on this, and if we are talking about this relationship with nature, it is inevitable not to think of the pandemic as nature. Nature is not the backyard tree. Do you know what we read a lot during the pandemic here in Brazil? Some indigenous thinkers disseminate their culture orally, from generation to generation, in this part of South America. Two thinkers in particular. Ailton Krenak [2], a member of the Krenak, who live along the Doce River, which was contaminated by the mining ponds. The other is David Kopenawa, who described the Yanomami worldview. The Yanomami are from northern South America. His book is called *The Fall of Heaven*. It describes how they have been facing death forever. This people are constantly suffering attacks from groups of prospectors who invade their lands and contaminate their waters, leading to death. In recent years, this tragedy has become an extermination policy. Brazil has been an agent of this genocide.



As Kopenawa says, « The crisis of war, of death, we are used to it. People die all the time, you are just not used to it.” I think we should hear these people who are used to death. They can help us understand what could be suitable for natural dynamics. These are beautiful lessons from an architectural perspective. Ailton Krenak said, «We need to gently tread the earth.” This is more than the image of a building on wooden poles. This is not what he is talking about, but rather how we can understand some dynamics so that our impact is adequate. Any action as architects and urbanists entails transformation, and that is our work. Now, the issue is how intelligently we do it.

Our next theme is “capital city”, and focuses on the question of the right to the city and the right 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 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?

20th century... What a century... this is an interesting and complex discussion. Since you mentioned housing, I would like to start by noting that much of the architectural production in the twentieth century was based on the idea of a new society stemming from the Russian Revolution. The possibility of a society with other social ties. This has driven much of the work that moves us.

Today it is simpler for us to criticise certain perspectives but imagine designing based on the idea of a socialist revolution... it changes everything! I think this attributed an enormous responsibility to these architects, who somehow imagined that their works could contribute to a slightly less unequal society. This seems to incorporate both sides of the question: the idealist and the powerful. Architecture as a transforming agent of society. This challenge posed by many 20th-century architects is very powerful; in fact, they created remarkable discourses and works that we continue to study and pursue. And the idea of habitat, of housing as a universal right, we cannot give that up; we will pursue it all our lives.

At the same time, this is a huge issue today, and it has increased in recent years of neoliberalism because the role of the state, the welfare state, has decreased. In Brazil, this has been terrible, terrible! So the question you ask, “of the role of the state in building this place of people’s lives,” is key, and requires revision. Unlike the historian [Francis Fukuyama], who stated that “history was over,” we are witnessing how quickly these twists are unfolding and that the role of the state has to be discussed again. The pandemic has made it clear. The distribution of resources is essential to the planet’s sustainability. The political role of our work has never been more important. It is a broad field of work. Behind any great architectural work, in any housing project, there is an architect shaping public policy. This professional is as important as the author of the works, who signs the project. There is no public work I know of or that I participated in that does not have an architect in a powerful position to support the idea. You are learning to design new buildings and cities. Sometimes this design is hidden, reinforcing the public or private institutions that allow this construction. They write the laws that allow for a fairer city. It is up to schools to investigate all dimensions of our profession.

Here in Brazil, we don't only train Niemeyer, Mendes da Rocha, Artigas and Linas; these are the exceptions, aren't they? Society as a whole has allowed for such people. This support is what we provide. It is very nice to think that you have collectively created the possibility for people like Siza, Souto de Moura, Inés Lobo to appear...

I feel sad that today the art market system has unfolded in the architecture market. We see so many young architects who move only within the small institutional worlds of museums and biennials, with such individualistic ambitions and so little transformative ambition. The discussions on housing, to return to this topic, are so new... Ines, remember that you invited me a few years ago to participate in a conversation about urban agriculture? Who could imagine that, in the 20th century, we would be discussing urban agriculture? Discussing the boundaries between rural and urban is really interesting. I consider housing as a broad idea of common life a right, and it goes through such different actions, doesn't it? Maybe I am straying from the housing issue, but we could now speak from a strategic perspective. It is very difficult for a country like Brazil to build new homes for everyone living in precarious conditions. In Brazilian cities, most of the population lives in houses they built. The city will be renewed from the large suburbs of Brazilian cities, which are all self-built. In our current economic system, there is not enough money or time to do everything at once.

I believe that the infrastructure for these houses will be renovated over time by the families themselves, through economic redistribution. This is a very suitable strategy for discussing housing. So the question of housing doesn't only involve a building, houses, but also the infrastructure that allows these houses to improve over time. Therefore, to install this infrastructure, some risk areas will need to be removed. The new houses will be built for people who will be displaced from the edges of streams and rivers, or from very steep slopes prone to landslides during heavy rain. More than just prototypes of extraordinary houses, they have to be built as interesting neighbourhoods for people to live. It is less a housing typology and more a construction of a good community place.

Years ago, we had an experience of building many houses here in Brazil in a system that was named "My House, My Life". It was a public program of financing house construction, but with the old idea of the isolated house, far from urban life, which would later require a huge job to bring infrastructure to these places without a city. And we cannot make this mistake again. We have to ensure access to the city, infrastructure, work, and employment, reduce displacement for people, and expand transportation options. The concept of the house is supported by the city much more than by its typology.

Going back to the question you asked about nature, nowadays we understand that any urbanisation or reurbanisation work is born of a very clear understanding of geography. So, our first observation is that the concept of precarious housing is associated with the water issue in São Paulo.

People without money settle in the strongest streams and ponds. Where there is no allotment. The projects are born from the knowledge of the river basins and from cleaning the waters, from the springs to the streams and then to the rivers, so that this clean water is not contaminated and is part of everyday life, i.e., from understanding a geographical situation, a natural situation, so that the new houses are installed. When we talk about the city, housing and nature, we begin to realise that, after a lot of effort, these interventions must be coordinated. Is there a discussion of housing?

[Ines Lobo]: Just an aside – it's interesting that you mention this now because the work we are doing here with this group of students is called "City, water, inhabit" and, therefore, we are investigating possible interventions in Lisbon, solving water issues together with this idea of combining this with housing. So there is one thing here that is quite common, quite similar in both of these territories; despite huge differences regarding housing issues, starting with size, of course, there is one thing that is more or less obvious and commonly accepted: it only makes sense to build housing if this is an engine for requalifying urban space to build the right to the city, which basically is what you said, which is very beautiful. Let's continue our interview, I just wanted to say this.

We now move on to the topic of "common floor, sharing" which refers to the public space and its relationship with social cohesion. 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?

Doris Salcedo... that artist is amazing! The arts help us a lot with languages that complement our way of thinking. It is beautiful to use art to formulate questions based on language. I have now remembered a sentence by Balzac, who says that "the painter should meditate with the brush in his hand." Thought deriving from action. We, architects, think a little like that. One of my friends, Marcio Sattin, a professor at Escola da Cidade and a philosopher, loves jazz and always jokes that he likes to see architects' sketches. You know that sketch you draw for yourself, that keeps repeating the solution, the same sketch again and again, until it is refined? He thinks that a jazz solo is very similar to architects' sketches - you think, draw and materialise and realise how this reasoning comes about.

I'm straying because you talked about Doris Salcedo. But the issue of public space is also very interesting. You see this as a mechanism of social cohesion. Public spaces are very particular social constructions of a place.

We architects need to be humble to understand that each place builds its collective space from very different traditions. For instance, in my country... Brazil abolished slavery in 1888, making it the last nation in the world! Do you imagine how complicated it is to define a public space here? We keep trying to build this public space; do you understand? As a social construct, many artists' works try to question, create tension around, and think about the limits of what we understand as a public space.

Guilherme Wisnik, who is a teacher, my friend and a writer, raises a very interesting question: In the 1960s, some Brazilian artists, for example, Hélio Oiticica, were trying to bring life - the domestic space - to public places. He built a home environment, the Penetrables, in the museum and put a guy living there for a week. He shared this guy's life. In contrast, architects here were designing houses that brought public space into private life. As examples, houses by Paulo [Mendes da Rocha], and by [Vilanova] Artigas. It is really interesting to realise how two fields of art were on opposite poles, discussing and stretching the limits of public and private lives.

This discussion evidences what the public space is in the work of Brazilian architects. I will tell you another story: we are always welcoming teachers from other places at Escola da Cidade. When we were studying Cuba, we invited an architect, Kiovet Sanchez. It was his first visit to São Paulo. He met MASP and SESC Pompéia da Lina Bo Bardi, the Sculpture Museum, the Pinacoteca and SESC May 24 by Paulo Mendes da Rocha, Artigas' Faculty of Architecture; i.e., he did a tour of the works here and, I remember it to this day, he made one of the highest compliments I have ever heard: «He draws life; these buildings in São Paulo seem to have been made for my people.» For a Cuban to say this... even today, I shiver at the memory.

Therefore, I think this discussion of our work's permanent public space is something each one of us responds to differently. We can think of Brasília as a place of road urbanism, based on the modern segregation of functions, as something outdated. Or remember that Brasília has public space; not all space is divided among the land's owners. In a country like ours, that is revealing. An extraordinary space experience we offer the world. Everything will always have both sides. A restricted vision or one that is aggregating, generous. Every time I go to Brasília and walk through those superblocks, even knowing that, unfortunately, it is not for everyone, that the poorest people live in satellite cities, I think Brasília is huge, just not bigger than Brazil. It is similar in terms of social segregation to any other Brazilian city. Here in São Paulo, there are the same forms of segregation. The poorest population have been driven away from the city centre. The problems of Brasília are the problems of Brazil. And it seems interesting to think that the public space, in a city like Lisbon, should be thought of with Lisbon tools.

The public space, if controlled and privatised, will, of course, favour those who have money. Our works can tense and even extend open spaces. I will give you an example: The São Paulo Art Museum, a project by Lina Bo Bardi, is striking for its open, generous public space along the avenue. It is striking because the exhibition space was open, contrary to museographical norms; it placed Raphael alongside a popular-art painter from northeastern Brazil. It broke hierarchies and proposed, in a South American and poor country, the possibility of understanding the work of art as a social collective construct, independent of the country, the times, the money... this disturbed so much that some administrations had carried out reforms, closed that space that Lina proposed, where the glass easels stayed in a single hall, all the works seen at once. And for a few years, we entered MASP, and I would go from room to room, as if I were in a 19th-century palace. Why? Architecture can be very strong from a discourse perspective, but it has weaknesses in management, everyday life, and use. So, for many years, MASP became unrecognisable.

Despite its frailty, it has a discursive strength. It seemed like the building screamed: "This is not how I want a painting to be shown", to the point that society, in an organised way, managed to resume and redo the exhibition space as Lina had designed. Architectural time is long, which allows for going back when it is initially met with an adverse, conservative reaction.

The sculpture museum, the MuBE, by Paulo Mendes da Rocha, was designed to be fully open as a public square for the city. At one point, they placed a grid that delimits the space, that lot, evidently against that architectural design, which has an entrance through the top street, an entrance through the bottom street, making an evidently public crossing. Every time Paulo Mendes da Rocha was asked about it, he said: "You know,

everyone knows, it was built to be open. It is no longer up to me to tear off these grids. Society will have to do that.”

We have already talked several times about the topic of inhabiting, but we have a question based on a sentence by Hashim Sarkis about collective living, which says the following: “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.” Our question is: How can a housing building ensure that its inhabitants share a common space?

It is so difficult to understand how a sense of community forms. Maybe when the whole world is screwed. Hence, one wants to help the other, because there is no other way. When you are screwed, you build an identity. It must be like this... this is a task for sociologists. [laughter]

We have recently undergone a total identity crisis in Brazil. Can you imagine what these last 4 years of life in Brazil have been with this outgoing President? It was hard to imagine that some of us see ourselves in this guy who was here, in this banality of evil, you know? And that is what authoritarianism is about: an evil perspective. The duality of Eros and Thanatos, death. From death as destiny, as project. How is this collective place built?

Then, I recently reread a very interesting book called “Em Câmara Lenta” by Renato Tapajos. He is a writer and filmmaker. He was arrested in the military dictatorship in 1968. I went to the launch debate of this new edition, made by Carambaia. He was arrested when he was in his 20s after deciding to leave for armed guerrilla resistance against the military dictatorship in Brazil. At one point in this debate, a boy from the audience stood up and said: “Renato, could you explain what led you to the resistance at that time, instead of fleeing the country when things here became ugly, when the police began to chase the citizens. What led you to do the opposite? Join the resistance and protect this country with your own life?” The writer's answer was: “It is very difficult to explain this to you, but at that time Brazil had built a sense of identity and collectivity that, for me, it was natural to join friends and say: It will not be like this; we will not give in to these guys.”

It is interesting to think in generational terms, isn't it? But he, in a very hopeful way, finished his answer, saying: “But I do not want to make a nostalgic speech, because what I have seen arising in the last four years in Brazil, with this authoritarian government, was a defence of democracy, groups created as identity, as a collective, that we will see emerge in the next few years. I didn't imagine I was going to see it happen again.”

The opposite of a completely individualistic life. A life of consumption, of ostentation rather than use. It seems people consume only to show off. There's a lot of this on social

media, on Instagram, where your life is crap, but those who see it on the app think it's wonderful. A factory of envy. Caetano Veloso has a beautiful song, Hidden Eclipse, in which he tells a story of a date that did not work out: "I am not profit; I am fame," do you remember?

An open architecture is beautiful, isn't it? That allows creating the collective in buildings, creating with freedom to be appropriate... they will only be complete with life, and there will be many lives; each generation will be completely different, and the building will remain there. That, I think, is amazing. It is the opposite of these real estate market advertisements. Of exclusive life. Buy a tiny apartment, divide it into many small rooms and list their uses. Deny the city and live in a condominium with a pet place, a kids' place... a sad, petty, exclusive and very little-lived urban life. It is all fame and no profit. [laughter]

Our next topic is “durable, reversible”; on durability, flexibility, and ruin. 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 into three moments forces us to another way of designing. Time is once again a fundamental datum in the process - construction time and lifetime. Should flexibility become a value to add in architecture?

I think so. I remembered Luigi Snozzi's aphorism: “If you want flexibility, build with stone.” The opposite of the idea of flexibility as something mobile, of permanent lightness. I think he is saying that this skeleton should allow all possible adaptations with some lightness.

Building requires a lot of energy and changes in matter. It requires reasoning from time cycles. There are always two sides: the permanent frameworks and the flexible, the life that can be transformed inside. The history of architecture has so many examples of changes in use: churches that have become libraries, etc. I mean, to think that buildings adapt to change in such a sensitive way, with intelligence. May we also make constructions that are assembled and dismantled! Kind of going back to that first idea of the two occupations of America, the stone and the wood, sometimes both, and knowing which will work best in different situations.

Last year, when Cris and I were at UAL in the workshop, which was amazing, Barbara Silva, your teacher, invited us to put on a small exhibition at Galeria NOTE, and we used the theme of actions that can all be changed and redone. We made a list of verbs and actions and put the prefix “re” in front, e.g., build – rebuild, urbanise – reurbanise, form – reform.

We did this in contrast to that beautiful work, that drawing by artist Richard Serra, which was a list of verbs – to fold, to cut. The painting was a list of actions he performed in his work: folding, cutting, stacking, twisting. Based on this work, we put “re-” in front of

everything to suggest that our work can redo everything. Do and redo, like the city that is always changing; we could also imagine that for architecture.

Trying to incorporate the idea that our work is never ready. Perhaps it is a strategy of those who live in a country like Brazil, where nothing is ever complete. The architecture does not end when the photographer takes a photo of everything when it is spotless. That is when the trouble starts! In fact, it does not start there; I think it starts in the first drilling on the ground for the first foundation.

It is interesting to think that the time when the building is a working site is already a discourse. Some buildings are more beautiful before they are finished than when they are complete. The first cooking of soil to make a brick is already part of the trouble, and it continues from there. Each action can be redone, but it leaves marks and energy. In each context, in each situation, we will respond intelligently and adequately, without having predefined anything, without prejudice, but knowing what did not work. For each situation, we will respond and make accurate decisions.

We now move on to “tradition, industrialisation”, to the act of building and the industrialisation of construction. 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 try to answer questions in a dialectical way. On this issue of industrialisation, our situation here in Brazil is interesting. Difficult, but interesting. Because it's like we have one foot here and one foot there. We do not have a construction industry system as comprehensive as those of the countries in Europe or the USA. At the same time, we no longer have a completely handmade construction situation, as some of our neighbouring countries still have. I find it nice that architecture reveals the place where it is.

We do not have the same building standards as European cities. I remembered that text by Siza about when he made his first project in the Netherlands, which said: “Now my job is to choose from a catalogue. Here in Portugal, I drew all the stops, drew windows, frames, I came to Holland, and I have to choose stops, doors and such from a catalogue.” Even so, he reinvented himself in that place and made extraordinary architecture. Sometimes we look at a building in France, fully industrialised and think, “Gosh, everything is industrialised, what an amazing thing. How can they have so many industrialisation options?”

In parallel, the extraordinary works of architects here in Paraguay, such as Solano Benitez, who reinvent forms of brick prefabrication, achieving maximum resource savings. Their structures are very light, have minimal thickness, and build large spaces. I also went to visit a work by Joseto Cubilla, in Asuncion, a five-story building built of soil, of sowed taipa, absolutely handmade and brilliant from an inventive point of view. I love to speak about this place.

We are in the middle of this path: while the real estate market of São Paulo builds from a dynamic, from speed and the industrialisation of much of its components, the entire periphery of the city, the large part of the city's housing, is made with the most precarious industrialisation, which is a concrete block, a ceramic block that people will stack manually.

I think architects in Brazil should comment on these two places. Why? Given the scale of the infrastructure problems we face, we cannot give up industrialisation, but at the same time, we should value certain knowledge, workers' cultural resistance and labour in our projects as complements. And often subvert the industrialised elements, using them for unforeseen purposes.

If architecture is solid enough as a structure, as a framework, you also use the concept of a skeleton as support, so that light elements can dress these buildings, undress, and dress again. This ambiguous place in which we are in Brazil can allow this reflection, i.e., to remove the most powerful thing from industrialisation, which is quality with quantity, with scale, in an absolutely conscious and responsible way, so that industrialisation is not the disaster that we experienced in the 20th century with the waters, the forests. It can also be a place of affection, of resistance, of knowledge, and continue to have qualified labour that builds things with joy.

Let us not be naive; the economy drives everything. We are talking as architects of our intentions. But if you do not want to give in, wash your hands of what is being done in the city by the real estate market and do not want to build only the exceptions, but rather the urban fabric, the rule of the city, and enter the game, the economy will choose materials and systems. So it is up to us to be aware of what is being done and to use this industrialisation intelligently.

I heard an interview with Oscar Niemeyer when he was over ninety years old, because he had lived through the entire twentieth century. And much of what we identify as Brazilian was invented by a few people: Pelé, Oscar Niemeyer, and Tom Jobim. Once they asked him what he thought of the new materials. The journalist wanted him to talk about Alucobond, plastics, and synthetic materials, and he replied: "What a beautiful question you ask me; I want to talk about new materials. Because, in fact, humans lived in caves and then piled stones and realised that they could put the compressed stones and make an arch, then made the bow, then started metal constructions, until they managed to use steel inside a liquid stone and made apparent concrete." He gave a half-hour speech about apparent concrete as a new material in human history. Oscar's thought was of another time frame. So, the journalist decided to change his question. [laughter]. Another time they asked him about building with wood, and he said: "I think I'd better not, because of wood bugs." Everyone laughed. It seems so interesting to me, after this wonderful sentence, to develop an industry capable of protecting wood from bugs. To use science for this.

In a country like ours, with this giant capacity to build from reforestation materials, high-density, renewable wood, and an efficient system that uses energy from the sun to produce it, it is impossible to ignore this technology. Not wood like a stick, but as an industrialised technique, where from a renewable raw material you can reach the limit of its technological reasoning. And draw from ancestral knowledge, the traditions of the Xinguocas, which use the technical limits of the wood fibre to be winged; they tension it enough to make a bow tied with ropes at the end, to make a giant house with a great

span. The ancestral intelligence of using abundant but now renewed material. Cultivated material, such as eucalyptus, is cut, glued, and laminated with precision in the industry. So that the workers can build a high building in the future with small pieces. Like the Eiffel Tower.

We have been working on the industrialisation of wood in Brazil. Some companies have developed systems, such as ITA Constructor, coordinated by engineer Hélio Olga and architect Marcus Vinicius Barreto Lima, and built houses with architect Marcos Acayaba, who was our teacher. Experiences have been carried out by architects and engineers who are advancing the industry technologically, leaving a new footprint that is fully updated for the 21st century. Let them gently tread the earth, as Ailton Krenak taught us.

Finally, the topic “scientific field”: the relationship between architecture and society. The question is: What is valued among architects, sometimes consensual, does not necessarily correspond to what is valued by the “ordinary person”. This demands a definition of architecture. How can we define it?

Let me think... the architects and artists I admire are the ones who thrill us. The architects who thrill the architects, the musicians who thrill musicians, i.e., those who advance their fields, who push the academic discussion to the limit, i.e., instigate those who do. But they are also absolutely loved by everyone who sees these works, who lives these works, who passes by them, even though they are not specialists. I think the great ones are like that. Tom Jobim is adored by musicians around the world. Jobim's harmonies are lessons, whether for a symphony orchestra musician, a popular musician, a samba musician, or a rapper. Jobim is loved by all musicians and also by everyone, the whole population. And it is also beautiful that everyone absorbs his music regardless of their musical knowledge. I do not play any instrument; I have no deep musical background, but I admire a musician like Jobim very much, within my limitations. I know that musicians will like him even more, because they have this other knowledge; they will relate Jobim to Chopin, Debussy...

I think architecture is like that too. Alvaro Siza's architecture is not only made for us: we love it, but everyone likes Alvaro Siza's architecture. He is an absolutely popular character in Portugal, as Niemeyer is here in Brazil; this is amazing.

I will tell you another story: Siza did this project here in Brazil, which is one of the greatest gifts we have won, the Ibero Camargo Museum in Porto Alegre. One day I went to Porto Alegre. I got off the plane, got a taxi, and chatted with the driver, who asked, “What do you do?” “I am an architect. I came here for a meeting at the Camargo Ibero Museum,” I replied. “Ah, you don't say”, he said. “Yes”, I confirmed. He then added, “I know a lot about the Portuguese architect who designed it.” “Seriously?”, I asked. “I know him well; I've driven him several times, I've even taken the architect to his museum”, he replied. “Ah, really? He's a great architect! I admire his work very much; I think the museum is beautiful”, I affirmed. Then the taxi driver spoke: “He's a very intelligent guy”, and I said: “I think so too, [laughs] a very intelligent guy”. I then asked him: “Why do you say that?” The taxi driver answered: “Because I once asked him: Architect, I wanted to ask you a question: why did you make a museum almost all closed off from the Guaíba River, which is one of the most beautiful rivers in the world? And you know what the architect told me? He said, precisely for that reason, how could I compete with one of the most beautiful rivers in the world?” The taxi driver then added, “See? Can you see how intelligent this architect is?” This means that architecture intrigues and brings out the

best in us. It should reveal the best of us as humans. If you have already felt moved before a work of architecture, you know what it awakens in us, the best of us; I really think that.

Last year, when I was there with you, I went to Porto and fulfilled a dream: watching a game between Braga and Portimonense with my two children at the Eduardo Souto de Moura stadium. For me, that was a great life experience; I was there as an architect, absolutely thrilled, in front of that work that incorporates the background mountain, the quarry almost as a character, as well as a person watching the game... I wonder how many people watch the games and comment: "That guy is a rubbish player" [laughs] while watching the popular game of football. Within an architecture like that, pure infrastructure, being able to insult players, complain about the referee, just ordinary things... it was an extraordinary thing. The experience of joining popular and scholarly in one place.

I am moved by the works we have seen from this extraordinary Mexican architect, Gabriela Carrillo, alongside Carlos Faccio and Mauricio Rocha, but also by other amazing Mexican women; i.e., when architecture touches you, it evokes the best of us. I think this is a bit of architecture's role: to broaden our horizons, open up other possibilities. We can't do anything alone. Architecture, as a field, convokes other knowledge: engineering, sociology, anthropology, everyone we have mentioned, including musicians; together, we build our place of life. And in this sense, architecture is a place of questions, more than for solving problems. It is also a place to shout: "the king is naked." It is also useful to speak, "This is not going well; what if we went this way?" We do not need to have all the answers; we have to be willing to make mistakes and try with courage. Responsible courage, because courage depends on responsibility. We are, as a profession, the opposite of conservative because we are transformative. We transform matter, cities, geography. So, our role is to continuously say "Look, maybe this is not the right way," and we're not just here to answer questions mechanically.

Because I do not understand an architecture project as a finished work. I do not believe in the architecture project as if it were that of an artist who knows everything. Drawing is never a definitive project. I believe we have a social role; we are trained and prepared to design, as society expects of us. And design in a broader way, I'm not just talking about buildings and footprints. I am speaking of designing in the sense of desire, imagining very different things; that is what we were trained for. That is what they expect from us.

So, you students, when you have the opportunity to be at a table with several other professionals who will have made extraordinary diagnoses, each in their respective fields: a soil engineer will have said: "This soil here is jelly; we will need deep foundations"; a sociologist will have said: "But we cannot impose ourselves, because this society needs a different design; they are fishermen..."; then an archaeologist will have spoken: "But we can't be in this place, because here's a sambaqui.", and another comments: "But wait, we have no money." Once each professional makes their diagnosis, they need us for the next conversation. And how do we do it? We use a drawing like a conversation starter, like an extended arm. And a drawing makes everyone start criticising, then chatting, and the conversation can thus continue. We should be fully aware of how important this process is. And so we draw again, as many times as necessary, because our first drawing will almost never be the one built. If that happens, it is because there was a conversation, and everyone somehow believed it should be this way. Drawings should not be understood as imposition. They often portray



us as the architects who impose everything on everyone. I think we should know what we are doing and have that responsibility. Not to be conservative and defend our ideas. What fulfils our social role of moving the conversation forward is seeing drawing as conversation in the broad sense, defending your ideas and knowing that your drawing will never be an imposition.

Thank you, Fernando.

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 Cardeira, 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.

[2] In this number Estudo Prévio publishes a review written by Delia Sloneanu of the Ailton Krenak's book "Futuro Ancestral".