

In *continuum*: five interviews and one visual essay on the theory and practice of contemporary architecture. Introduction to the dossier

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. CEACTIONAL – Centro de Estudos de Arquitectura, Cidade e Território da Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, Portugal.

Rita Aguiar Rodrigues

rrodrigues@autonoma.pt

Architect, teacher and PhD student at the Department of Architecture of the Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa (DA/UAL), Portugal. CEACTIONAL – Centro de Estudos de Arquitectura, Cidade e Território da Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, Portugal.

To cite this article: LOBO, Inês; RODRIGUES, Rita Aguiar – In *continuum*: five interviews and one visual essay on the theory and practice of contemporary architecture. Introduction to the dossier. **Estudo Prévio** 28. Lisboa: CEACTIONAL - Centro de Estudos de Arquitectura, Cidade e Território da Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, june 2026, p. 88-90. ISSN: 2182-4339 [Disponível em: www.estudoprevio.net]. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26619/2182-4339/28.4>

Received on June 1, 2026 and accepted for publication on June 2, 2026.

Creative Commons, licence CC BY-4.0: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

In *continuum*: five interviews and one visual essay on the theory and practice of contemporary architecture. Introduction to the dossier

Architecture maintains an ambiguous relationship with change. Emerging from the desire for transformation – the shaping of the landscape, the accommodation of different forms of occupation – it inevitably acts upon what remains: cultural heritage. Each project encounters a geography, a territory, an ecological system, a built legacy, currents of thought, building practices – a set of relationships that precede it. Every project represents a possibility of articulation with the existing built environment, and with all the resources – material, ecological, immaterial – invested in its construction, as well as with the history of the discipline itself. This tension between transformation and permanence, between the yearning for the new and belonging to a pre-existing context, is an age-old and central issue within the discipline.

Cities exist because they have had the capacity to change. Buildings survive because they have been transformed. Territories take on new meanings whilst continuing to bear the marks of the successive occupations that shaped them. And the discipline of architecture is built through this ongoing dialogue between what we inherit and what we

reject and add at a given time. It is simultaneously a practice of continuity and a practice of invention. However, throughout history, we have not always attributed equal weight to both forces of this tension.

Identity, whether individual, collective, or disciplinary, results from a continuous process of construction and reconstruction. And we now recognise the imperative need to reconsider the assumptions upon which we understand the role of architecture and its practice. Not necessarily because the problems we face are entirely new, but because we recognise the limits of the criteria we use to address them. The dichotomy between nature and urbanity has been exhausted; the contemporary city can no longer be understood and planned through totalising models, and the existing has become the primary field of operation for architecture, progressively understood as a process in *continuum*.

Our understanding of the territory, the city, and the discipline's mission remains deeply shaped by the assumptions of the Modern Movement. We are heirs to a tradition that placed its full trust in the transformative power of technology and new structures, in the specialisation of programmes and the separation of functions, in the idea of continuous progress, and in the possibility of formulating universal solutions to universal problems. This legacy has produced extraordinary achievements. It has also produced a particular way of looking at reality, which we must question.

With the exception of issues arising from the climate emergency, which are deeply linked to the circumstances of the present time, we recognise a surprising familiarity in many of the themes that today occupy the centre of the debate: the emphasis on repair and adaptation, rather than replacement; the need to design more durable and flexible buildings, capable of accommodating different uses over an extended period of time; the search for ecological balance between natural and urban systems; or the need to revive, and reconcile with industry, ancestral materials and methods of construction, frequently emerge as contemporary responses to contemporary problems. But these are, in fact, concerns and solutions that have accompanied the discipline of architecture ever since it set out to reconcile the production of thought with the ingenuity of construction.

For much of its history, architecture has been a practice of adaptation. Buildings were successively transformed, with the reuse of their materials, enabling new uses. Cities grew through accumulation and superimposition, and the structures built endured across generations without this necessitating their systematic replacement. Permanence did not mean immobility, and transformation did not necessarily entail demolition. In this sense, many of the issues we now consider urgent do not constitute a break with the discipline's tradition. On the contrary, they may represent a return to practices that have accompanied architecture for centuries and which only became less visible during a relatively brief period of its history.

This is not about advocating a return to the past. The scale of global urbanisation, the climate crisis, pressure on resources, changing ways of life and the growing complexity of urban systems present unprecedented challenges. Similarly, we now have resources and technologies that allow us to revisit, theorise and reinvent these practices.

It was these concerns that led to the production of the series of interviews compiled in this dossier. Between December 2022 and June 2023, architects Inês Lobo and Miguel Judas, together with a group of students from the Department of Architecture and



Urbanism at the University Institute of Lisbon (DAU-ISCTE), undertook a reflective exercise centred on the issues they identified as being most fundamental and relevant to the thinking and practice of contemporary architecture. The work consisted, first and foremost, in constructing a set of questions: the city; the articulation between ecological and urban systems; housing; the common ground; forms of collective life; 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 locations, cultural contexts and generational backgrounds – Tom Emerson, Ricardo Carvalho, Fernando Viegas, João Nunes e 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.

Through images, and a journey through his photographic archive, Duarte Belo traverses different geographies and historical periods, constructing a narrative that spans history and the various forms of human occupation. His essay reminds us that temporal continuity – upon which architecture inevitably operates – never manifests itself in a linear way. The landscape is revealed to be made up of ruptures, overlaps, accelerations and continuities. The *continuum* of history is, paradoxically, constructed through multiple discontinuities.

The interviews and essay that follow do not seek to establish a common position or offer definitive answers. On the contrary, they reveal different ways of understanding the same historical condition. A condition marked by the need to critically rethink the tools through which we observe reality, and by a growing awareness that architecture continues to find a significant part of its scope of action in the delicate relationship between that which changes and that which remains.

If architecture can be understood as a discipline that operates on time, perhaps the contemporary challenge does not lie in choosing between transformation and continuity, but in coming to understand them once again as inseparable parts of the same process.