



Nuno Teotónio Pereira, Unprecedented realism in architecture and in life.

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Abstract

The contemporariness of his work is evident proof of its timelessness. He was the activist of the Modern against the “national” style and aimed to attain truth in architecture while maintaining its roots. He believed in a third way, which allowed him a critical perspective on the dogma of Modern thought and led him to fight for bridging the gap with vernacular architecture and for the need to reconcile history and memory. His work is also that of a teacher because his office was a place of innovation and discussion outside academia. He was a pioneer of team work, always available to attempt new solutions. His “school” was based on research, on the openness to think outside the box, on his tolerance. Moreover, he was a brave citizen, known for his solidarity and contribution to society and for sharing his concerns with others.

Keywords: Nuno Teotónio Pereira, realism, architecture, social, activism.

Full Paper

I had the pleasure of knowing Nuno Teotónio Pereira, the architect who changed Portuguese architecture, for over thirty years. I also had the chance to know the generous, fair and frank man who fought for social causes. We built an intense, loyal and supportive friendship. In 2005, when Nuno invited me to speak at his Honorary Doctorate, I remember beginning my tribute speech saying that what I found most impressive, in his architecture and in his life, was his honesty and his endless search for truth. His architecture is based on concepts rather than shapes. He was methodical and demanding, as well as critical, original and controversial. His intellectual curiosity, and his need to intervene are evidence of someone who believes the world can be made better.

The contemporariness of Nuno Teotónio Pereira's work is evident proof of its timelessness. He was the activist of the Modern against the "national" style and aimed to attain truth in architecture while maintaining its roots. He believed in a third way, which allowed him a critical perspective on the dogma of Modern thought and led him to fight for bridging the gap with vernacular architecture and for the need to reconcile history and memory. His work is also that of a teacher because his office was a place of innovation and discussion outside academia. He was a pioneer of team work, always available to attempt new solutions. His "school" was based on research, on the openness to think outside the box, on his tolerance. Moreover, he was a brave citizen, known for his solidarity and contribution to society and for sharing his concerns with others.

At the age of 25, Nuno Teotónio Pereira advocated the need to build without prejudice and with the purest of intentions. The concern should be building well, "preciso construir sem preconceitos e com pureza de intenções. Com uma espécie de inocência infantil. A preocupação terá que ser construir bem". Throughout his work, he remained true to plan "with the purest of intentions", connected to reality, to places and to people. His work evidenced his social to political commitment.

Nuno Teotónio Pereira, who became an architect in 1947, was well-known not only due to his work but, in particular, due to his role in Portuguese society. Not only is he a reference in Portuguese architecture but his office was a place of critical thinking and discussion, a school outside academia which, at the time, was old-fashioned and repressive. Several generations of some of the most

important architects in Portugal worked there: Bartolomeu da Costa Cabral, Nuno Portas, Gonçalo Byrne, Pedro Vieira de Almeida, Pedro Viana Botelho. He was an active citizen who fought against injustice and the Estado Novo regime (the regime of the dictatorship in 20thc Portugal) and was arrested several times by the political police, PIDE-DGS. He participated in the vigils at S. Domingos church, and at Rato Chapel, he founded the Catholic renewal movement, Movimento de Renovação da Arte Religiosa (1952-1971), to which he presided, the cooperative, Cooperativa Cultural PRAGMA, the Centro Nacional de Cultura, the Portuguese Architect Association and the Architects Council of Europe.

As a student, he bravely fought for Modernism and had an active role in the dissemination of reference literature and published excerpts from Le Corbusier's Cité Radieuse and from the Athens Charter. At the same time, Nuno Teotónio Pereira believed in a third way, which allowed him to keep a critical perspective on the Modernist dogma and attempt the link with vernacular architecture. Another example is the fact that he promoted the publication of Fernando Távora's text, "O problema da casa portuguesa" (the issue with the Portuguese house).

As he resisted simply accepting the dogmas of the Modernist movement, Nuno Teotónio Pereira sought inspiration in Portuguese culture to humanize architecture. Therefore, in the late 1940s he was pioneer in raising awareness to the need to reconcile history, tradition and future, modernity and history, space and time.

Two facts will be relevant at the start of his career. On the one hand, having worked with Carlos Ramos and having attended Porto University, thus escaping Lisbon academia. On the other hand, his work in a technical environment, the office of engineer Vasco Costa, which would influence his way of thinking, release him from formal restraints and open his imagination to a more construction-oriented perspective. This environment of technical thinking would test his functional skills in understanding structures and their relations with shape. This enabled him to choose and use materials without prejudice. Unlike the "modernists" of his generation.

He sided with the social concerns of the Modernist Movement, which he blended with his Catholic beliefs. As such, housing became his chosen research theme and, in 1944, he created a housing cooperative as a school project, a concept in which he blended nineteenth-century philanthropy and Modernist ideals. The issue of housing was part of the Modernist agenda, a relevant theme for post-war Portuguese architects, who affirmed their concern in the 1948 Conference, in

which Nuno Teotónio Pereira presented, with Costa Martins, an idea that evidenced his full understanding of the issue of social exclusion and proposed solutions at city and national levels.

Deeply interested in social affairs, he conducted research on this matter through organizing within a course from the University Catholic Youth (JUC) at the School of Fine Arts in Lisbon (EBAL), the first survey on the conditions of multi-family buildings in Lisbon, “Inquérito às condições de utilização de edifícios plurifamiliares em Lisboa”. His contributions to the study were important (a text on housing for as many people as possible, “Habitação para o Maior Número”). He also designed innovative social and economic housing schemes (in Braga, Castelo Branco, Barcelos, Sodapóvoa, etc.) within the scope of his consulting position at the Federação das Caixas de Previdência-Habitações Económicas (1948-1971). In 1973, with Bartolomeu Costa Cabral (1929-), he designs Bloco das Águas Livres, in Lisbon, a pivotal point in the Portuguese Modernist Movement because it represents the first instance of International Style in the history of Portuguese architecture. This construction is formally innovative, designed so as to be similar to a small community, and includes housing, offices and shops. Many artists were involved in its design and implementation: Frederico Jorge, Cargaleiro, Jorge Vieira, Almada Negreiros, among others. In 1955-1956, he participated in the survey on Portuguese popular architecture, Inquérito à Arquitectura Popular Portuguesa, which included the most qualified architects at the time. From 1957 to 1974, together with Nuno Portas, Nuno Teotónio Pereira became known for his critical perspective on Modernist orthodoxy.

Besides his initiatives regarding housing, he also fought for a contemporary religious architecture, free of the stigma of history. He was an activist of M.R.A.R., the movement for the renewal of religious art (Movimento de Renovação da Arte Religiosa), a group of progressive Catholics who believed in the relevance of change in religious Art and Architecture as well. Unlike what was common at the time, they considered that “keeping silent was betraying their calling as architects and as Catholics” (1953). In 1949 he began the project Águas Church (1950-1952) which would become a paradigm of religious architecture renewal in Portugal. This new perspective would be developed in the Sassoeiros Monastery (1958-1960) and fully implemented in Sagrado Coração de Jesus Church (1962-1970; Valmor Prize 1975) by means of an exhaustive search for inner space and a smart environmental integration, opening the religious space to the urban space and allowing it to be integrated at architectural scale. This church evidences his rejection of historical churches built in the 1950s in Lisbon, recovers the

Pombalino style concept of sacred space in urban territory by means of a yard that connects the two streets thus opening the church to society and its values and to citizenship. The same concepts are visible in Almada Church (1965-1967), a church integrated in a green park.

In the Olivais-Norte project (1959), with its set of powers and bands, he proposes an innovative space organization and the participation of artists in a social housing scheme. He was awarded the Valmor Prize again (1968) and, for the first time, this prize was given to a social project. In 1965, with Braula Reis, he designs the controversial project Braamcamp (“Franjinhas” -”Bangs”), a building for shops and services in which he resumed the concept of integrating public space in a housing structure. For the very first time, architecture is brought to public discussion, in a passionate debate involving professionals, critics and the general public. In the 1970s, the plan for Alto do Restelo evidenced the rediscovery of the importance of the street and the square in the traditional city. The architect resumed the concept of the *façade* and especially the formal value of the block as a core element in architecture; he reinstated the relevance of the orthogonal course as diversified typology and redesigned the blocks at a place where 1960s modern towers and blocks had a strong impact. In the 1980s, he planned the bank CGD at Horta (Azores), opting for a design that contextualized the building in its surroundings. He was responsible for refurbishing and enlarging Taborda Theatre, whose contemporary construction he kept. This project is again co-authored with Bartolomeu Costa Cabral (1979-1989).

Large-scale intervention would be resumed in the late 1990s, led by Pedro Viana Botelho in a study on transportation complex, “Intermodal do Cais do Sodré”, in which he blended, in a very unique way, the train, subway, boat and bus networks. The concerns with citizenship and public space enhancement Nuno Teotónio Pereira’s office was known for are reaffirmed here. Working in the heart of the city, in the riverfront, the importance of enhancing the value of public space and of urban types in the traditional city were again under the spotlight.

Covilhã Polis Project, a state project on urban planning, is perhaps the major urban intervention of Nuno Teotónio Pereira’s office. So as to preserve and upgrade the creeks, Nuno Teotónio Pereira added pedestrian access. He started by focusing on the valleys between the two creeks, in whose banks were two textile plants that are now part of the city’s industrial heritage.



The project evidences the coherence of a large-scale design in which pre-existing structures, the land and its typology are viewed as a fact so as to provide rather prosaic but always creative answers. In fact, the city and the territory are issues he both considered and acted upon, bearing these in mind in all of his plans.

Nuno Teotónio Pereira was an active member of the Union, was later the President of the Portuguese Architects Association and a relentless fighter for the recognition of the architect's role in society. He was awarded the National Prize in Architecture, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Prize (1961), the AICA Prize (1985), the Prize of Instituto Nacional de Habitação (1991) and the Biennial Iberian-American Triennial for his impressive career. He was the president of M.R.A.R., of the cooperative PRAGMA, of CNC, of the Architects European Council. Lisbon City Hall awarded him the city's medal of merit. Among other decorations and recognitions, he was awarded the Grã-Cruz da Ordem da Liberdade and the Grã-Cruz da Ordem do Infante D. Henrique. In 2003, the Architecture School of Porto University (FAUP) awarded him an Honorary Doctorate and in 2004 the Architects Association, in partnership with CCB and IPPAR, included the Office NTP (Nuno Teotónio Pereira) in the celebrations of the National Architecture Year and in the Exhibition on Architecture and Citizenship. In 2005 he is awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the Architecture School of Lisbon Technical University (FAUTL). Nuno Teotónio Pereira was also an author and a researcher - *A Arquitectura do Estado Novo, Prédios e Vilas de Lisboa* co-authored with his wife, Irene Buarque are examples of this.

To fully understand his career, we must bear in mind his commitment to social issues and his intervention in Portuguese society. He fought for housing "for as many people as possible" with bravery and good design. Today more than ever, we must remember his life as a relentless fighter who believed that "the city is collectively owned".

In view of all of this, Nuno Teotónio Pereira is an example of coherence, discipline and tenacity. His passing has left Portuguese architecture poorer.

Our responsibility to be worthy of his teachings, of his bravery, intelligence and generosity is immense. Nuno Teotónio Pereira, we thank you for your teachings, for showing us the importance of discipline and demand, for having shared your will for a better world, for your life of solidarity and generosity.

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