

INTRODUCTION - SPECIAL ISSUE

Building in the SOUTH - Laboratory for the Bases of Contemporary Portuguese Architecture.

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Introduction

The political and economic scenario of the new millennium involved a critical discourse on architecture. After the affluent 1990s, a time when the European project became more consolidated, came a time of instability that spread through different aspects of society - east-west conflicts, financial crises and technological developments led to a change of cycle and new world order. This process evidenced the vulnerability of European convergence and revealed the difficulty southern European countries experienced in keeping up with the demands of today's economy. A rather introspective and humanistic feeling, the concern with environmental issues, identity and sovereignty principles influenced the discourse of several social movements which were organized in this period.

In the field of architecture, this disquiet triggered a regenerating sensitivity and the idea of returning to a solid basis, able to consolidate the foundations of project practice and culture. In Portugal, the four decades of democracy were analyzed so as to uncover an idealistic basis that would allow for overcoming the crisis. In this context, the South, cultural ancestor of Europe, was considered an inspiration for an alternative to the ongoing process.

Ulysses's return to Attica after the Odyssey described by Homer is a metaphor for present awareness of the critical return which, as in past events and as Winckelmann (1717-1768) demonstrated, is founded on classical culture order and proportion. This process also entails a vernacular awareness that includes acquired knowledge sedimented in the territory and in geography, linked to the ancient wisdom of architecture and its underlying construction, energy and typological systems.

In the past, this basis guided the production of Andreas Palladio (1508-1580) when, upon the decline of the Venetian Republic, started building villas in the Venetian region. The classical sense of Palladian architecture lay in how the architect incorporated Vitruvian bases to support implementation criteria and control over the geography of rural space. Returning to a construction system based on lintels and columns opened the possibility to a classical play that responded to a new society which, after the Bagnolo treaty (1484) and the opening of Atlantic seaways, had started expanding its presence in the mainland towards the inland of the Venetian region.

The return to the foundations of architecture is closely linked to the inevitable return to the “lab” of the South, where, since the first agricultural societies, the basis of architecture lie.

Portuguese Culture and the culture of the South - Vítor Figueiredo and Siza Vieira in Évora.

The current social and political scenario of instability opened the opportunity for understanding the specificities of a unifying thought underlying contemporary Portuguese architecture and its link to the South.



We should here mention the insights and production of the American historian George Kubler (1912-1996) who, while researching the specificity of national Mannerism in the critical period of loss and recovery of sovereignty, led to a critical and historiographical thought on Portuguese architecture in his 1972 book *Portuguese Plain Architecture: Between Spices and Diamonds, 1521-1706* (Kubler, 2005). The peripheral and distant sense that characterizes the most western country of Southern Europe was analyzed as a recipient of influences from other cultures, such as that of Flanders and Spain. Plain architecture, defined by Kubler ““between spices from India and diamonds from Brazil” (Kubler, 2005, p. ?), is a response to political, military and religious factors which is made manifest in a clean style of architecture, independent of classical rules and academic norms dictated by Italian authors.ⁱ Kubler refers to an architecture that is economical and focused on the essential and allowed for a link between past and future, fostering introspection able to mix Palladian logic and the essays by Terzi, Torrava, Baltazar Álvares, or João and Diogo de Castilho. In the framework of this historical era, Kubler not only included the historiographical knowledge regarding a time of wealth in the reign of king Manuel I but also created the foundations needed to integrate a generation of architects, led by Siza Vieira (n. 1933) who would attract international recognition after the revolution on the 25th April 1974.



Picture. 1 – Álvaro Siza Vieira, Bairro da Malagueira, Évora [photo by Paulo Tormenta Pinto]

Journals such as *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, *Architecture Mouvement Continuïte*, or *Lotus Internacional*ⁱⁱ would show what was produced in Portugal at that time, as well as the concepts present in the production and the discourse of architects. *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*ⁱⁱⁱ, in particular, would publish a theme issue on Portugal in 1976 entitled “Dossier Portugal An II”, presenting a wide perspective and, as Gonçalo Byrne stated in his paper “the guidelines of a new architecture” and the mentors engaged in this new challenge.

The pragmatic character of plain architecture would contribute to explain and guide young architects who, on the one hand, faced new territories in the outskirts of the cities, and, on the other, the need to implement ideas compatible with the end of the Modernist movement. In 1962, Fernando Távora summarized this

when he mentioned the idea of “circumstances” (Távora, 1982, p. 34) as the grounds for a humanist process of space organization. He defined “circumstances” as a set a factors surrounding the individual “aquele conjunto de fatores que envolvem o homem, que estão à sua volta e, porque ele é criador de muitos deles, a esses haverá que juntar os que resultam da sua própria existência, do seu próprio ser.” (Távora, 1982, p. 34). The meaning of the word chosen by Távora included the sense of open construction, built with the awareness of time and able to accommodate the complexity of actions carried out in the territory.



Picture. 2 – Álvaro Siza Vieira, Bairro da Malagueira, Évora [photo by Paulo Tormenta Pinto]
The relation between George Kubler’s work and the process taking place in Portugal in the transition towards democracy was defined by Duarte Cabral e Mello (1941-2013) in a paper published in the journal *Arquitetura* (Mello, 1979), in which the author recalled the importance of the American historian’s work on

the architecture of Vítor Figueiredo (1929-2004). Cabral de Mello drew a link between plain architecture and the independence and experimentation of social housing projects developed in that time and under budget restrictions. In order to describe the work by Figueiredo, Cabral de Mello emphasized the lack of ornamentation, the freedom from academic rules and the vernacular style, typical of plain architecture, which is closely linked to present traditions “às tradições locais vivas do que aos autores de um passado remoto” (Mello, 1979, p. 25). Kubler’s work paved the way to scholarly thought on the survey on popular Portuguese architecture (*Inquérito à Arquitetura Popular Portuguesa*), which had involved architectures from 1955 and up to its publication in 1961, and which represented an architecture influenced by the contradictions of a Mannerism carried out far away from Europe’s main cultural centres.



Picture. 5 e 6– Vítor Figueiredo, Mitra University Campus, Évora [photo by Paulo Tormenta Pinto]

In the 1990s, this would be taken to the extreme by Vítor Figueiredo in the Mitra university campus (1992-1995), in Évora. The architect designed a morphological structure defining a long yard, characterized by its monotonous composing elements in the vicinity of the archetypal church of Bom Jesus de Valverde, whose design is attributed to Manuel Pires or Diogo de Torralva

In the context of the work by Vítor Figueiredo, Mitra appears as a synthesis of an architectural theory where essential paradigms converge that underlie the “mythology” of debate carried out in Portugal in the last two decades of the 20thc. These paradigms include the rejection of imposed stylistic nuances: through novelty, through aiming to adjust implementation and topography; through aiming for growing anonymity, in the belief that the work may be absorbed by the changes in territory throughout time; and through the idea that implementing a work in a geographical constellation to where the place’s material and immaterial meaning converge.



Pictures. 7 – Vítor Figueiredo, Mitra University Campus, Évora [photo by Paulo Tormenta Pinto]

Álvaro Siza Vieira also designed social projects in the city of Évora in the 1970s, such as Bouça and São Vítor. In 1977, he designed the urbanization project of Quinta da Malagueira. In view of its dimension and complexity, Malagueira is a

core work in the career of Álvaro Siza. Designed to include 1200 houses in about 27 acres, this project linked Siza and the city of Évora for about 20 years. This project, carried out in an area where Roman remains can be found, is the starting point for a conceptual exploration phase on classical structures, rather unassuming and constantly renewed through the manipulation of references in each work.



Picture 3 – Álvaro Siza Vieira, Malagueira Neighbourhood, Évora [photo by Paulo Tormenta Pinto]
At Malagueira, Siza was able to exploit the foundations of his architecture, manipulating basic issues such as infrastructure, typology, white materiality, the yard, light and shadow in a laboratory mode. In this project, the cubist composition is highlighted by the intense light and the deep shadow around it

which unify the project in the vicinity of the historical downtown of Évora, harmonizing and disciplining the city's expansion in the last decades.



Picture 4 – Álvaro Siza Vieira, Malagueira Neighbourhood, Évora [photo by Paulo Tormenta Pinto]

Malagueira's plasticity established a link with the traces of the Arab world mainly present in the South. The *kasbah*, proposed by Team 10 as an urban alternative to the determinism of the modern city, is worked by Siza in the narrow tension created inside the neighbourhood and inside the buildings, evidencing the inspiration collected in the trip the architect made to Morocco in September 1967.^{iv} That trip is present in Siza's work and in Portuguese culture, as Alexandre Alves Costa (n.1939), *compagnon de route* in this adventure, describes:

“E assim (...) nos aventurámos (...) pelas cidades que aportuguesámos ou construímos, pelas capitais imperiais, pelos Atlas, pelos vales dos rios que chegam ao mar. Pelo Sahara numa silenciosa areia que não foi pisada e, entre mesquitas, minaretes e ruínas de cidades clássicas, *atravessámos fileiras de cavalos que sacudiram suas crinas nos alísios*”, entre visões poeirentas de alcácereskibires, com a serenidade de quem revisita as terras da sua infância agora explicadas pelo Guide Bleu. (Costa; Vieira, 2011, p. 7)



Picture 8 – Vítor Figueiredo, Mitra University Campus, Évora [photo by Paulo Tormenta Pinto]

The South as a laboratory for modern construction in Portugal

Noteworthy is to analyse the development of critical thought on modern Portuguese architecture. One of the cornerstones of controversy regarding the “desired” blend between modernity and tradition (important in the debate on national architecture in the 20thc) may be found in Raul Lino’s (1879-1974) thoughts on the campaign “Casa Portuguesa” (Figueiredo, 2007, p. 319-366) and the underlying Southern sensitivity.

The author of *A nossa Casa* (1918) and *Casas Portuguesas* (1933) launched the debate. However, the debate dates from the end of the 19thc and is made more visible in 1900, in his design of Portugal's pavilion for the Paris World Fair. The design blends several styles and eras and clearly draws inspiration from the Arab traces present in the Alentejo region “um atrevimento (...) inspirado em estilos de várias épocas combinados numa composição verosímil e bastante harmoniosa, em que sobressaiam reminiscências amouriscadas do nosso Alentejo”. Lino states that the Alentejo region was his first love upon his return from Hanover (where he studied under Abercht Haupt (1852-1932) “primeiro namoro depois do regresso a Portugal,” (Lino in AAVV, 1969, p. 29).

Lino's grand tour around Portugal in 1897-1898 with watercolour painter Roque Gameiro (1864-1935), marks the start for his fascination with the South and with the Southern “way of life”. His interests lay particularly in the mudejar style “o mudejarismo e o pseudo-mudejarismo do Alentejo e Algarve”^{vi}. According to Pedro Vieira de Almeida, this was essential for Lino's career “Peregrinação que o fizera entender os valores formais de uma arquitetura de sol, as subtilezas dos jogos de claros escuro, de transparências e reflexos de muros caiados e de maneira mais responsável, os valores de habitar que esse vocabulário definia”.

Raul Lino would go on another trip around the South, to visit Morocco, in 1902, with the help of Alexandre Rey-Colaço and of his brother Emílio-Rey who lived in Tangiers, where the family came from. This would be the final argument as the grounds for the hypothesis “4 Casas Marroquinas”, launched by Vieira de Almeida in the catalogue on Lino for the exhibition in Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, in 1970 (Pimentael et al, 1970, p. 138). The houses Casa Monsalvat (1901), Silva Gomes (1902) and *Villa Tânger* (1903), in Monte do Estoril and Casa Jorge O'Neill (1902), in Cascais, some of the first houses the architect

designed, evidence the impact of his experiences in a territory where shapes and lives were free of influences and allowed for a return to the beginning of time.

Raul Lino's interest for the South was naturally fostered by Albercht Haupt's interest for Renaissance art from Southern European countries and in particular that of Portugal, which he deemed distinctive and unique. The research *Die Baukunst der Renaissance in Portugal* (Haupt, 1986), is Haupt's PhD thesis, which he presented in 1893, at Hanover University, a review of his visits to Portugal between 1886 and 1888 (Belchior, 2010).

George Kubler, in *Plain Architecture*, based his research on that conducted by Albercht Haupt. The interest these authors share regarding the period after the late Gothic Manueline style evidences the link between them; they both have an interest and a fascination for the Renaissance and Mannerist period in Southern Europe, and particularly in Portugal rather than in other European countries. These arguments contaminated the thought and the actions of architects regarding modern perspective, both in the early 20thc and in the years following the 1975 revolution, in which Portuguese architecture gained its international recognition.

Conclusion – Journal Estudo Prévio

“Building in the South” refers to a laboratory approach to the foundations of architecture as a scientific field which, at a time of crisis, become a consistent research theme. This issue of the journal Estudo Prévio aims to focus on a unifying discourse on different places and by different authors.

In this context, the first paper, by **Álvaro Domingues and Ana Silva Fernandes**, aims to critically analyses contemporariness and urban phenomena external to the

western world. Using a syllabus, the criteria for the “Urbanization of Poverty” and the crisis within territory management mechanisms are discussed.

Framing this process at a global scale allows to view from a distance the relevance of the South as main stage for modernity as observed by Jorge Luís Borges and the literary journal *Sur*. This is the theme for **José Luís Saldanha**’s paper, in which he demonstrates the rising of a new culture made evident in the nuances derived from the conflicts posed by this new era.

Alexandre Marques Pereira describes the *grand tour* by Gunnar Asplund to the Mediterranean South, carried out in the tradition of 19thc Neo-Classical Romanticism, pointing out the fascination Nordic architects had for the cradle of classical culture and its sense of continuity.

The North-South dichotomies are discussed by **Alexandra Saraiva** through Raúl Hestnes Ferreira, who brought to national soil the foundations for realistic construction, typical of Mediterranean culture, which he learned at a distance, in Finland and in the USA.

Ana Vaz Milheiro continues this discourse discussing Manuel Vicente, who, in parallel with Raúl Hestnes, furthers the shift towards the South and the building of bridges with the East in a cultural diaspora blended in his architecture and intellectual production.

“The detail in the general project” is the theme of **José Maria Assis e Santos**’s paper, in which he acclaims the shadow in the Herdade da Mitra university campus, the last work of architect Vítor Figueiredo.

Filipe Mónica’s paper is the last in this special issue on “Building in the South” which includes several short interviews to architects who participated in the summer course under the same name, held at ISCTE-IUL between 27 June and 1 July 2016.

Notes

ⁱ CORREIA, José Eduardo Horta (2005) “Prefácio à edição portuguesa” em KUBLER, George - A Arquitectura Portuguesa Chã – Entre as Especiarias e os Diamantes (1521-1706). 2ª edição Nova Vega, Lisboa, 2005 . ISBN 972-699-758-5. (p. 8-9).

ⁱⁱ See. VIEIRA, Álvaro Siza; ROUSSELOT, Christine; BEAUDOIN, Laurent - “Entretien avec Álvaro Siza” in Architecture Mouvement Continuïte, nº 44 de 1978; AAVV - “Dossier Portugal An II” in L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui nº 185 –, de maio/junho de 1976; VIEIRA, Álvaro Siza - “L’Isoala Proletária come Elemento Base del Tessuto Urbano”, in AA.VV Lotus International – Rinnovo Urbano, nº 13 de 1976; GREGOTTI, Vittorio - “Oporto. L’esperienza dei Saal, di Alexandre Alves Costa Interventi a S. Victor, Bouça, Lapa, Leal, Antas, Miragaia, Barredo, Lada Oporto”, em AA.VV - Lotus International – Architettura nella Città Storica, nº 18, de 1978; HATCH, Richard - The Scope of Social Architecture, New Jersey Institute of Technology, de 1984. (SAAL/Curraleira, Lisbon Portugal / SAAL and the Urban Revolution in Portugal / Designing Curraleira).

ⁱⁱⁱ BYRNE, Gonçalo “Quelques prémices pour une architecture nouvelle” em AAVV - L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui – Dossier Portugal An II, nº 185, de maio/junho de 1976 (p. 32-33).

^{iv} Trip to Morocco in September 1967 with Alexandre Alves Costa, Beatriz Ekroth, José Grade, Luísa Brandão, Maria Antónia Leite and Sérgio Fernandez. See. COSTA, Alexandre Alves; VIEIRA, Álvaro Siza - Marrocos 1967, Circo de Ideias, Porto, 2011. ISBN 978-989-95995-2-9.

^v * Dante Alighieri (tradução de Vasco Graça Moura) – La Divina Commedia: L’inferno. 1996, Cant. XXVI, tert. 33-37, (p. 241).

^{vi} MANTA, Paulo - *Raul Lino – Arquitectura e Paisagem (1900-1948)*, PhD thesis, photocopied text ISCTE-IUL, Lisboa, 2012. (p. 109); Quoted in. LINO, Raul, (1970) *A vida corre – o Tempo continúa* [palestra] Available in the family archive (p. 4).

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