

ODAM and the Construction of a Modern Spirit

By Edite Rosa¹

The ODAM as divulger of modern architecture in Porto comprehends from the scope of teaching, professional practice, to its internationalization, as attests the participation of its members in CIAM's congresses from 1951. Its production, written manifestos, projects and builds, reveal its universal character through the deployment of Modern spirit, in the statement of a collective conscience of architectural practice, but also, affirms its local condition as its differentiator value. This retrospective and critical reading of the specific ODAM discourse as part of broader context that characterizes Modern Architecture (re)affirms its character simultaneously universal and singular.

The Organization of Modern Architects (ODAM) aims to promote the principles of modern architecture, seeking to affirm, through the own work of its components, how to form professional conscience and how to create the necessary understanding between architects and other technicians and artists. Therefore, the ODAM seeks to promote Modern Architecture through, exhibitions, conference publications, etc. The basis on which seats their professional labor, are:

- *Contribute to valorize the Individual and the Portuguese society. Encourage technical and lay people, architects, trained or in training, engineers and builders, to an efficient and effective work towards the progress of the country*

- *To obstruct that amateurism aggressive, dangerous and dishonest, spreads and throws architecture into chaos.*²

The New Social Role of the Architect

The ODAM³ congregated 36 architects linked to the School of Porto (EBAP *Escola de Belas Artes do Porto*) and constituted a turning point in Portuguese architectural production [figure 1]. ODAM fits in a universal project that pledged its commitment on new scientific and technological knowledge for the benefit of proper inhabiting conditions for all. This democratic and useful attitude of a new social role of the architect operates a qualitative leap in

architectural discourse. ODAM proposals criticize and accentuate the retrograde and stagnant regime position, based on archetypes of "imagery" and iconographic nature of past styles, monumental or regionalist. This attitude brought ahead in the 1945 inaugural text "*O Problema da Casa Portuguesa*" (The Problem of Portuguese House)⁴ of Fernando Távora, assumes itself as the first public stance against the inconsistent interpretations of the regime ideology, the denominated "Portuguese style", proposing an update through modern architectural values. This text is possible given the short opening policy of *Estado Novo* regime, in the post-war period that briefly allows internal freedom of expression enabling opponents of all cultural and intellectual sectors to criticize the current social, cultural and economic crisis situation. In this renewing debate at national level, as regards Ana Tostões,⁵ two organizations arise, the ICAT (*Iniciativas Culturais Artes e Técnicas*) in Lisbon in 1946, constituted by architects and artists, and ODAM in Porto in 1947, constituted by architects and students from the EBAP engaged in the renewal of the architecture discipline. In Porto, besides the opposition to the architectural norms imposed by the regime, it is the Modern position in architecture that conforms itself as a common premise. The group, consisting of heterogeneous personalities from political, cultural and generational point of view, has to justify the common understanding from academic formation (EBAP), centers of gathering creased among and inside the studios and the widespread lack of freedom and autonomy in discipline.

The ODAM group added three successive school generations of architects and architecture students.⁶ The first, formed between 1935 and 1940, tutelary figures of the group, consisting of architects who exercised their professional activity. The second, formed between 1940 and 1945, major force of the group, composed of recently graduated architects, working without CODA.⁷ The third, formed between 1945 and 1950, consists of members, still students, protagonists of the future construction of a Modern ideology in the Portuguese late 50s context.

The local importance of ODAM is reaffirmed at national level, through the visit of architects from Lisbon to Oporto in 1947, published in the Magazine *Arquitetura: Revista de Arte e Construção* with the title "*Inspirada lição de arquitetura moderna*", ("In-



Figure 1. Members of the ODAM in 1951. Photo of some members of the group at the Work Exhibition, Ateneu Comercial do Porto.

spired lesson of Modern Architecture”⁹ attesting the innovative nature of their works. This professional exchange will be decisive for an important national event, according to Cassiano Barbosa:

“[...]it is necessary to highlight ODAM’s intervention as a union element of the will of North Architects towards the realization of the first National Congress of Architecture in Lisbon in 1948.”⁹

In turn, the Congress encouraged the architects of the group to state up, writing its ideals, presenting thirteen individual theses and one collective one. ODAM’s activity, disclosed initially in the 1948 Congress is strongly reaffirmed at the Exhibition and Cycle of Conferences held at the *Ateneu Comercial do Porto* in 1951. The addressed issues are applicable to all architectural problems, from housing policies to the means involved in the process of construction and its implementation, industrialization, standardization, promotion of new materials and even strategies of educating new architects. In the 1951 exhibition, the leitmotif of the group “Our buildings are different from the past because we live in a different world”, a part of a MoMA’s text, promotes adhesion to an international vision of Modern Architecture. A vision of social utopia identified by ODAM with the ideological assumptions of Modern avant-garde and CIAM’s proposals, particularly those set out in the *Charte d’Athènes* and Le Corbusier’s writings.

From the theoretical and practical group production, in which the construction of “ODAM’s modern form” emerges, we can distinguish three learning moments of modern foundations.

Modern Manifesto versus National Aesthetic

Until the group’s formation in 1947, its pre-modern form prevails characterized in the simultaneous use of “traditionalist” and “new spirit” citations.

The dichotomy between the Modern composing form and the traditional productive culture—always intrinsic to architectural ODAM genesis—expresses itself paradigmatically in the proposal of the CODA Delfim Amorim of 1947 [figure 2]. The dialectic discursive between the “new” and, or “old” advances to a selective import of international models adjusted to the social reality and local production. A “methodology of universal reason”¹⁰ mediated by an approach to Le Corbusier’s universe that corrects the arbitrary composition of the eclectic academic education of EBAP in a simultaneously discourse of renewal of the Modern models and of the truth in beneath traditional architecture, as counterpoint to the false “traditionalist” architecture of the regime.

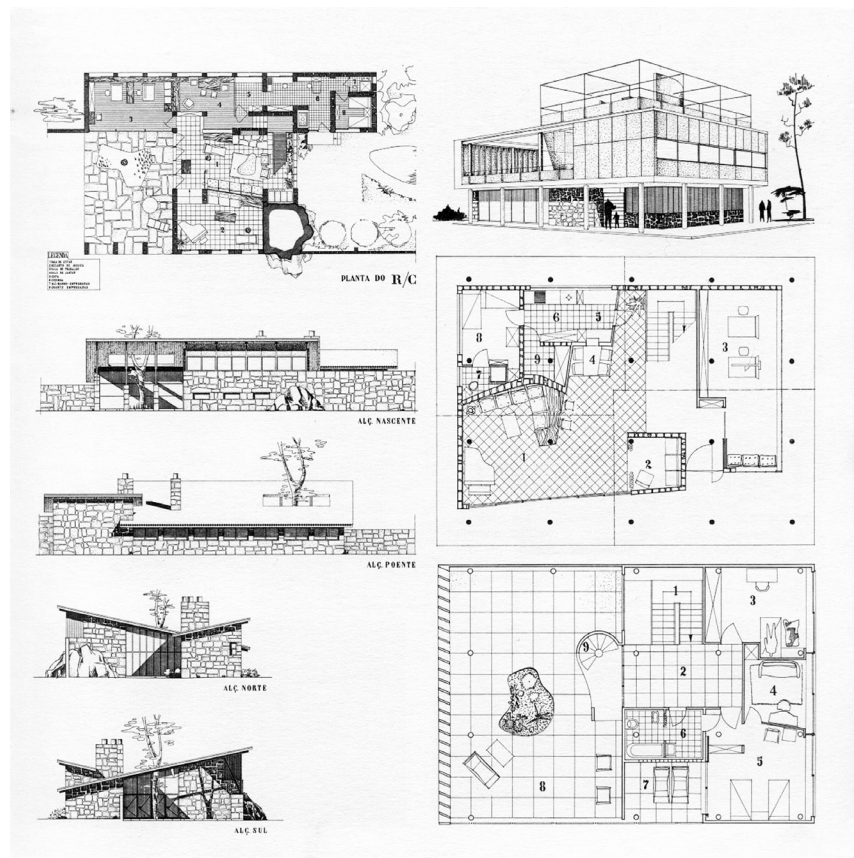


Figure 2. Delfim Amorim, CODA, My house, 1947, Porto, Portugal. Two different approaches: traditional and modern. Archive of FAUP.

Modern Scope

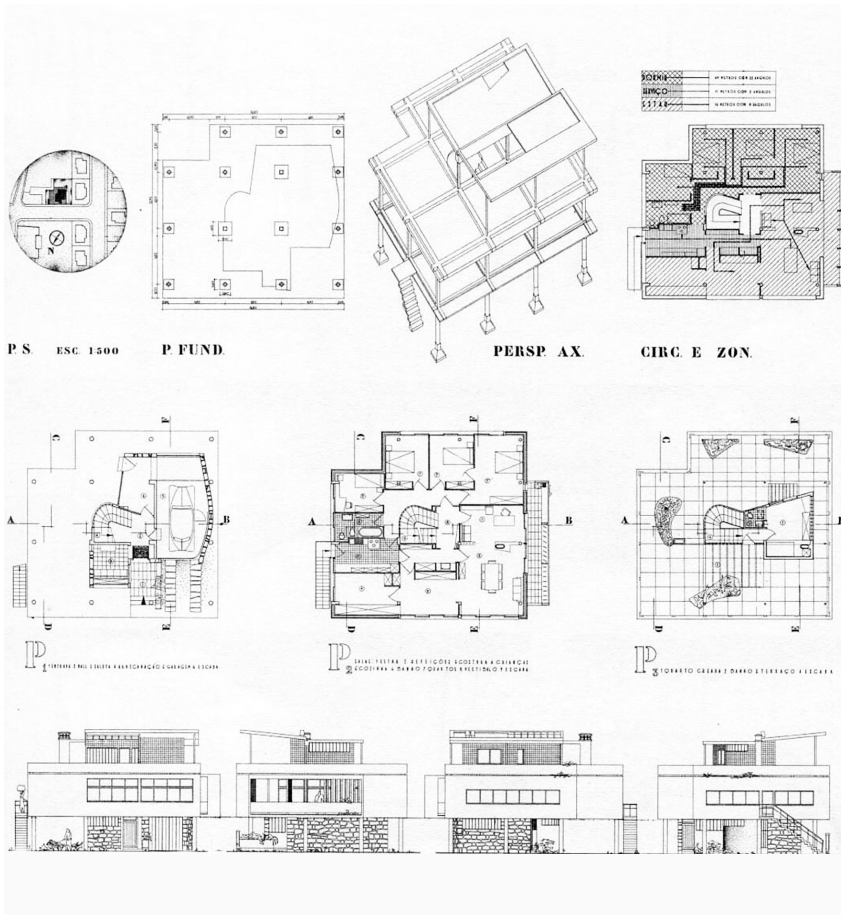
From 1947 onwards, “ODAM’s Modern physiognomy”, settled on reinforced concrete, is based on experimental studies of LNEC of large infrastructure constructions, partly because this material is used in the current building, close to the conventional and monolithic structure and in the absence of other material industries (such as steel or wood). But the reference of “*machine à habiter*” refers to plasticity contents more than strictly technical ones, justifying for ODAM the “purist” aesthetically, for, despite the propaganda done to reinforced concrete, as motivator of its form, in the end, its expression is independent of the identifying new technique of the constructive material. The mechanical component of the Modern architecture will be mediated from the proposal of Le Corbusier, where the new technological universe is embedded in the architectural expression but is not the ultimate goal.

The abstract, intellectual morphology of the new system and material is pressed into expressiveness densities “Mater”, founded upon the themes of Unity, Function, Structure and Shape of the classic EBAP educational and transcribed to the five points of ODAM, as written by Oliveira Martins.¹¹ A tension is given by thickness to the Modern form of ODAM,

more real than the immaterial “purist” architectural “object”, that emphasizes the expressive image of the new techniques and materials, as is recognized in the paradigmatic examples of the CODA Oliveira Martins of 1950 [figure 3] or in the *Edifício do Duro* of Mario Bonito [figure 4].

Moreover, the construction thematic, the confrontation of the modern repertoire is evidenced within the differentiating expression of the program, the increase of substantive architectural valences, the apology to a technically advanced image and a preference for an industrial image. The industrial aesthetic is produced subtly by means of rudimentary elements, most of the time craft made (metallic ripped, broken-light wooden blinds, fixed grid, shed lights, etc.) used repeatedly generating complex texture shapes, such as the *brise-soleil* on the *Edifício de Ceuta* façade surface. This conception configures the precision of the detail as a rigorous controller between idea and its materiality and as a fundamental element in the plastic expression of the design project [figure 5].

In 1952, on ODAM’s “object” scale, the differentiation with the central European models, stand out with less rigid forms, larger variety of materials, less strictly functionalist, more liberated, in search



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of a good integrator of design artisanship. The formal paradigms of Le Corbusier are transformed into a logical system that runs in search of more expressive forms of the exterior envelope and specially the coverage roof, but remains intrinsically a *universal* matrix based on the modular structure, morphological simplicity of single space, free, fluid and thought from the inside.

The scale of the city apprehended in the “sun, space and greenery,”⁴² has a strategy in ODAM, the replacing of the “garden city of rural purpose” imposed by the regime for the “park city” of urbanity for all. However, the bet is on the autonomous collective housing block in height, as a modular unit design of the “new city” or as an experimental prototype of habitat social condenser, particularly in new forms of accommodation and housing research of the Unité d’habitation, as is clarified in the typological research in *Edifício Praça do Império* of Pereira da Costa [figure 6] or in the *Edifício Parnaso* of José Loureiro [figures 7a, 7b].

Maturation of the Modern

After 1952 there is the period of acceptance and experience of the singular Porto identity where the

autonomy gained in the confidence of the acquired Modern experience is clear. The abstract purity of form is associated to a more humanized local identity and to a demand of valences previously relegated as “memory” and “instinct”. The gradual acceptance of the conditions of individual consciousness and of the regional context of architectural production visible in ODAM’s work “*Habitat rural, uma nova comunidade agrícola*”, (“Rural habitat, a new agricultural community”) presented by he group in the CIAM X in Dubrovnik, related to the new problems of the communities and the of city, predicts a future process that reverses the centrality of the debate to the specific cultural environment of ODAM. The preference for local materials and construction systems will be neutralized by the Modern experience that will set to the expression of traditional materials as modern plastic, a transition synthesized in 1956, on the paradigmatic House of Ofir by Fernando Távora [figure 8].

Conclusion

We may characterize the “Modern form of construction” of ODAM as an architecture of apparent resistance to innovation, by circumstance and

culture, but that integrates the valences of Modern rationality in obtaining efficient effects, managed by a strict instrumentality in the search of a functionality adjusted to specific experiences. ODAM, attentive to architectural experiments in European post war reconstruction and simultaneously to the emerging revision of Modern dogmas, reveals with more prominence the own crisis of European Modern architecture. ODAM guides progressively, from its constitution, the passage of the “programmatic” to the “empiric”, the claim of Modern uniform principles, to the development of diversity and, simultaneously, of a global and more axiomatic vision (theoretical) to a strictly professional viewpoint and hereafter, more individual. ODAM begins to solve this crisis with the actualization on architectural (re)invention of Modernity, more organic, more diversified and more committed to the content and meaning of the built.

Notes

1. FAUP, Architect degree (1991), Scholarship Investigator of FCT, DEA of the ETSAB (2000) and Ph.D in Architecture of Catalonia Polytechnical University (2006). Actually I&D projects investigator of CITAD and CEAU/FAUP. Since 1994 Professor of Architectural Project Design, Theory,



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Figure 3. Oliveira Martins, CODA, House for middle-class family, 1950, Porto, Portugal. ODAM'S dom-inó formal construction. Archive of FAUP.

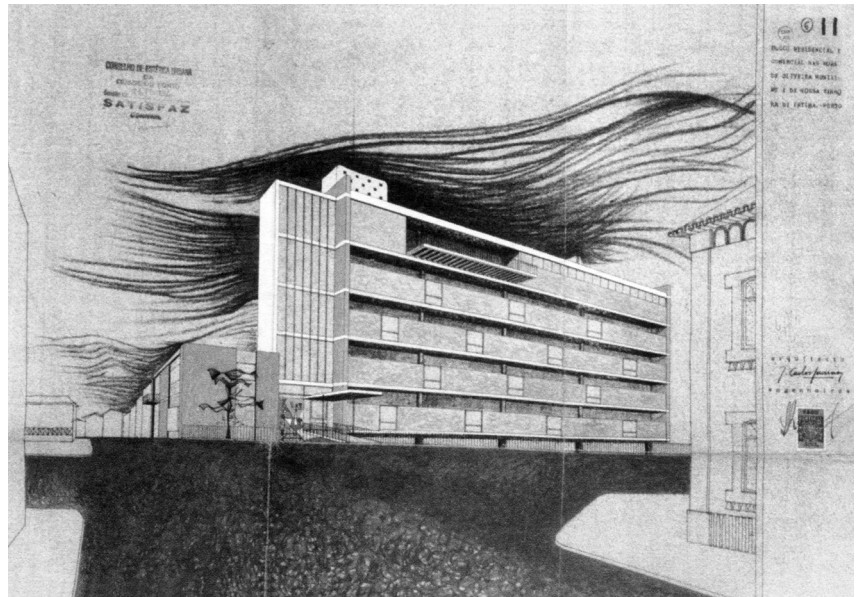
Figure 4. Mário Bonito and Rui Pimentel, *Edifício do Ouro*, Porto, Portugal, 1951. Photo by Edite M. F. Rosa.

Figure 5. Arménio Losa and Cassiano Barbosa, *Edifício de Ceuta*, Porto, Portugal, 1950. Photo by Edite M. F. Rosa.

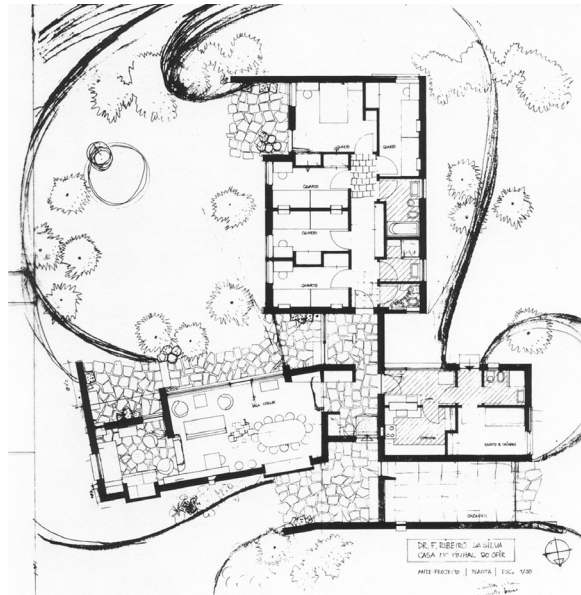
Figure 6. Pereira da Costa, *Edifício da Praça D. Afonso V*, 1953, Porto, Portugal. Photo by Edite M. F. Rosa.

Figures 7a, 7b. José Carlos Loureiro, *Edifício Parnaso*, 1954, Porto, Portugal. Photo by Edite M. F. Rosa.

Figure 8. Fernando Távora, *Casa de Ofir*, 1956, Ofir, Portugal. Archive of Fernando Távora.



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and Thesis at FAAULP. She works in several public and private projects with Álvaro Siza since 1991 and in her own studio, er&ja arq, since 1997.

2. Barbosa, Cassiano (Compilation) ODAM: *Organização dos Arquitectos Modernos do Porto, 1947-1952*, Porto, Edições ASA, 1972.
3. Acronym used with double reading, *Organização Dos Arquitectos Modernos* or *Organização em Defesa de uma Arquitectura Moderna*.
4. Távora, Fernando, "*O Problema da Casa Portuguesa*", Porto, *Cadernos de Arquitectura*, 1947. Published initially in the weekly journal *ALÉO* (10 de Novembro 1945). Enlarged later, in 1947, to 16 pages, by the demonstrated interest of the class of architects.
5. Tostões, Ana, *Os Verdes anos da arquitectura portuguesa dos anos 50*, 2ª ed, Porto, FAUP publicações, 1994.
6. From the first generation we highlighted, Arménio Losa e Cassiano Barbosa, Artur De Andrade, Alfredo Viana De Lima and Agostinho Ricca. Some linked to teaching, A.Losa, in 1945 and Agostinho Ricca in 1951. Of the second generation we highlight, Luís José Oliveira Martins, João Andresen, Adalberto Dias, Eduardo Matos and future teachers of EBAP such as Mário Bonito, Fernando Távora, José Carlos Loureiro, Delfim Fernandes Amorim. Of the third generation we highlight, António Matos Veloso, Fernando Eurico, António Corte Real, Octávio Lixa Filgueiras, Pereira Da Costa and João Tinoco.
7. CODA, *Concurso de Obtenção do diploma de Arquitecto*. Contest for obtaining the diploma of Architect. Proof realized normally some years after the end of the course,

during activity, constitutes an evaluation of a real project in order for the recognition of the capacity of exercise of the professional practice.

8. S/A "*Inspirada lição de arquitectura moderna*", *Arquitectura: Revista de Arte e Construção*, 2ª série, ano XXII, nº 19.
9. Barbosa, Cassiano (Compilation) ODAM: *Organização dos Arquitectos Modernos do Porto, 1947-1952* Porto, Edições ASA, 1972, 16.
10. Veloso, António Matos "*Habitação rural e urbanismo*", ODAM: *Organização dos Arquitectos Modernos do Porto, 1947-1952*, Porto, Edições ASA, 1972, 56.
11. Martins, Oliveira "*A Arquitectura de hoje e as suas relações com o urbanismo*", ODAM: *Organização dos Arquitectos Modernos, 1947-1952*, 83.
12. Lima, Viana de, "*O problema português da habitação*", ODAM: *Organização dos Arquitectos Modernos, 1947-1952*, 25.

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- S/A "*I Congresso Nacional de Arquitectura: Conclusões e votos*", *Arquitectura: Revista de Arte e Construção*, 2ª série, ano XXII, nº 29 (Feb./Mar.1949).
- S/A "*Tese ao X Congresso do CIAM, Arq. Viana de Lima, Fernando Távora e Octávio Lixa Filgueiras*", *Arquitectura: Revista de Arte e Construção*, nº 64 (Jan./Feb.1959).