Apropos of Lisbon's Modern Architecture (1925–1965)

BY JOÃO BELO RODEIA

in memory of Nuno Teotónio Pereira (1922–2016)

This issue of ***docomomo*** *Journal* is dedicated to the modern architecture of Lisbon, the city chosen to host the *14th* ***docomomo*** *International Conference*. It includes a series of essays written by nine university researchers which, on the one hand, present specific examples (buildings, urban complexes, urban plans) and paradigmatic architects of Lisbon's modernity, and consequently, on the other hand, provide a succinct overview of almost four decades of modern architecture and urban planning in the Portuguese capital, spanning four generations of architects[1] and divided into two separate periods, broadly speaking before and after the WWII (1939–45).

Notwithstanding, the pertinence of this issue extends much further than the mere pretext of the venue for the *14th International Conference* since, in view of **docomomo**'s specific rationale and aims, the modern experience in Lisbon (and Portugal) deserves a much wider and better dissemination in international terms, not only because of its own intrinsic value, but also because of its specificity, both of which are much more relevant when one considers the country's peripheral contingency, the respective absence of any of the main premises that generated modernity in European architecture, the political context from which it resulted and the subsequent socio-cultural conservativeness of the country, the city and many of its elites.

Even though there can be no doubt, and particularly so in this century, about the growing national recognition afforded to this modern architectural heritage, as expressed by the legal protection given to many of its buildings (which in itself is inseparable from the fertile research and documentation originating, above all, from the academic community), it is no less certain that much of this heritage is located in areas that are themselves being subjected to widespread and highly volatile processes of urban renewal. Not to mention the pressure that is being applied through land speculation, property development and the attempts to change the use of such heritage for inappropriate purposes, added to the fact that it is also subjected to a legal framework for building and construction that is largely unsuited to its specific nature and its aesthetic, functional and constructional characteristics. Or, in other words, at a time when Lisbon is witnessing an obvious economic resurgence, much of this heritage is under quite severe threat, whether as a result of its abandonment, its incapacity to envisage new uses, the rapid transformation of its respective contexts, the devastation caused by impetuous or erroneous interventions, or even, to put it bluntly, through its elimination, as recently happened with the Children's Swimming-Pool in *Campo Grande* (1960–64), designed by Francisco Keil do Amaral (1910–1975), one of the city's foremost architectural references. Seen from this point of view, and taking into consideration Lisbon's modern architectural heritage, this *Journal* is seeking not only to make a contribution towards the enhancement of its heritage value or its respective socio-cultural recognition, but above all, to stimulate reflection and action with regard to its future safeguarding and foreseeing its correct and appropriate reuse. And, since this is the case, the local dimension of this case-study is transported to another, more global level, to the place that has been one of **docomomo** International's main concerns under the presidency of Ana Tostões, as expressed in the very theme for the Lisbon conference: *Adaptive Reuse. The Modern Movement Towards the Future*. It is, in fact, within this framework that we should read and understand the quite unique essay by Catarina Wall Gago about housing and contemporaneity, looking at recent reuses that have been introduced in Lisbon's *Baixa Pombalina* district.

It is beyond the scope of this introduction to present the full historical context of modern architecture in Lisbon[2], from its somewhat late appearance in the late 1920s, motivated by the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris, to its plurality in the 1960s, already out of the world of the *International Congresses of Modern Architecture* (CIAM, 1928–59). Even so, we consider it important to make some remarks and observations to help in the reading of the essays presented.

It should be stressed that Portugal did not escape the overwhelming authoritarian wave that swept across a large part of Europe in the 1930s, culminating in the victory of Franco and his supporters in Spain (1939) and in the *État français* of the Vichy government (1940). After the 1926 military coup that brought an end to the 1st Portuguese Republic (1910–1926), the beginning of the next decade was to witness the firm establishment of the corporative regime of the *Estado Novo* (New State, 1933–74), ideologically fuelled by the Catholic Church, the French far right and Italian fascism. One of its greatest particularities was to have lasted so long after the WWII, which proved possible both because Portugal did not take part in this conflict or join forces with the Axis countries, thus remaining distanced from the political execration of those who were defeated at the end of the war, and because of the regime's capacity of adaptation in the postwar period, immediately supported by the first phase of the Cold War (1947–53). Only in the transition from the 1950s to the following decade did the

Estado Novo begin to display any obvious signs of an internal crisis, caught between the outbreak of war in most of its African colonies and the distinct social and political expectations of growing sectors of society, inseparable from the country's ever more rapid economic development in the 1960s.

In other words, not only did Portuguese modern architecture always take place under the regime of the *Estado Novo*, to which it was obviously subjected but, at the same time, it was only possible with its compliance — or that of some of its protagonists — and its respective public commissions, no matter whether or not the architects were in favor of the situation. In fact, between the late 1930s and the end of the war, the period when the regime most fuelled the ambitions (so highly prevailing at that time) of a self-referential architecture caught up amid nationalistic historicism and folklorism, Portuguese modernity limited itself to survival through the completion of works in progress, with many of its modern pioneers devoted to those ambitions. And, furthermore, on countless occasions, both before and after the war, modern projects came up against all manner of obstacles raised by the more retrograde sectors of the regime (and of society itself), as well as the ever-spreading tentacles of State bureaucracy, with such difficulties becoming even worse immediately after the war, both because of the volatility of the political situation and the disappearance or gradual fading away of protectors, and because of the generational (and political) distancing of the more recently emerged architects, who were now determined to adhere to the radical modernity[3], highlighted at the *1st National Congress on Architecture*, held in Lisbon, in 1948.

The appearance and affirmation of pioneering Lisbon (and Portuguese) modernity, apart from the strong determination inherent in many young architects and the support of their *compagnons de route* within the regime, as was the case with António Ferro (1895-1956), the director of the *Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional* (Secretariat of National Propaganda, 1933–45), were due to the decisive role played by state commissions (both national and municipal), and most particularly the vast and rapid campaign of public works undertaken in the 1930s and led by the minister Duarte Pacheco (1900–1943) from the new Ministry of Public Works and Communications, who also played an important part in Lisbon as the mayor of its Municipal Council. The first two generations of modern architects were the ones who benefited most from these commissions, and because of this they enjoyed the possibility of traveling around Europe. And, in the case of the Council of Lisbon, the effects of Pacheco's reforming activity — in matters of planning, infrastructure, equipment and housing — were to endure well beyond his premature death and the war itself and afforded leading roles to architects who were active within that context, namely João Guilherme Faria da Costa (1906–1971) and Keil do Amaral, both of whom played decisive parts in shaping the city that we can still see today. Either wholly or in part, half of the essays published in this *Journal* deals with this time and its circumstances, with João Pardal Monteiro writing about his great uncle Porfírio Pardal Monteiro (1897–1957), Daniela Arnaut about the *Instituto Português de Oncologia* (Portuguese Oncology Institute, 1927–48), on which, among others, Luís Cristino da Silva (1896–1976) and, in particular, Carlos Chambers Ramos (1897–1969), both worked, and Silvia Salvatore writing about Faria da Costa. The perfectly reasonable exception is the essay by Paulo Tormenta Pinto about the work of Viriato Cassiano Branco (1897–1970), which tended to be more the result of private Lisbon commissions.

In the same way, these same public commissions were no less important for strengthening and consolidating modern architecture in the postwar era, even though they had now lost the dimension and splendor of the 1930s, and were dissociated from the government's central planning system and from the influence of leading political figures with the caliber of Pacheco. Once again, it was the Council of Lisbon that was to play the most prominent role in this context, setting in motion a singular group of opportunities for the architects of the new generation, from the late 1940s onwards, with a major impact on the city's architecture and urbanism. If there was any surprise, then this arose not so much from the predictable difficulties for the reaffirmation of modern architecture in the regime's eyes (and all the more so when many of the young architects supported the political opposition), but more from the relative rapidity with which some members of the public administration were prepared to comply with or even serve as accomplices in this reaffirmation. In fact, from the early 1950s onwards and, for the first time, instigated by the State itself, there began to appear initiatives for the international dissemination of Portuguese modern architecture buildings, almost all of them originating from public commissions, namely in São Paulo (1953–54), London (1956) and Washington (1958). The second half of the essays demonstrates this time and its circumstances, with Tiago Farinha writing about the complex of *Infante Santo* Avenue (1945–55), designed by Alberto Pessoa (1919–1985), together with Hernâni Gandra (1914–1988) and João Abel Manta (1928–), Ricardo Carvalho writing about Ruy Jervis d'Athouguia (1917–1986), evoking a remarkable series of works that were the result of public (and municipal) commissions, and Teresa Heitor writing about the Chelas Urban Plan (1960–64), coming from the Lisbon Council's Technical Office for Housing and coordinated by José Rafael Botelho (1923–)[4], and following on the other two large urban plans for the capital in the postwar period, Olivais Norte (1955–58)[5] and Olivais Sul (1959–65)[6]. In turn, the essay by Ana Tostões highlights the singular nature of one of the most important modern buildings in Lisbon, the headquarters of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (1959–69) designed by Athouguia, Pessoa and Pedro Cid (1925–1983), and commissioned by an important private socio-cultural institution.

For a long time, at least until the late 1950s and, continuing along the trail that had been established by the cyclical French influence on Portuguese culture since the 19th century, Paris was to be the central reference and preferred destination for the Lisbon (and Portuguese) modern architects — firstly (almost) without Le Corbusier (1887–1965) and then with him — in the two periods that have been marked out, i.e. before and after WWII. For both of these periods, especially after 1932, it is important to highlight the constant presence of the French magazine *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (1930–) in Lisbon, far and away the most pre-eminent among the foreign architecture journals received in Portugal until the mid-1950s, whose edito-

rial orientation over time was to maintain a reasonably analogous position with that of the Portuguese modern experience[7].

It seems that the 1925 Paris exhibition was decisive in promoting the blossoming of Lisbon (and Portuguese) modernity, and it should immediately be noted that such an induction did not involve the expression of the more exuberant version of Art Deco, which was clearly omnipresent in Paris, but the more depurated one, which is truly surprising given the national context and even considering the endemic shortage of resources that, in general, shaped Portuguese commissions in architecture. Indeed, in many of its best results, the adherence to the moderate form of modernity[8] exhibited by the first two generations of Lisbon architects was closer to that of the French *école constructive*, such as the work of François Le Cœur (1872–1934) or Auguste Perret (1874–1954) or, albeit only occasionally, to the prismatic and functional systematization of the primitive Germanic *Neues Bauen*. At the same time, it was also closer to a more or less refined *nudiste* expression, sometimes coming close to the radical modernity, especially of the so-called *école de Paris*, ranging from Marcel Roux-Spitz (1888–1957) to Robert Mallet-Stevens (1886–1945), but also to other temperate forms of modernity, such as that of the Dutch Willem Martinus Dudok (1884–1974) or even the German Erich Mendelsohn (1887-1953), with the distinct sensitivities sometimes being brought together in the same work. Towards the end of the 1930s, one could feel some Italian influence, not that of *razionalismo*, but the influence of the heirs of the *Novecento*, now refined in a narrow form of neoclassicism, such as the work of Marcello Piacentini (1881–1960). One should not, however, forget the so-called Parisian *moment 37*, which was also marked by simplified monumentality. And finally, as far as urbanism is concerned, the adherence to modernity was defined by the decisive influence of the *Institut d'Urbanisme de Paris* (1919–2015) — where Faria da Costa studied — and that of the *Société Française d'Urbanistes* (1911–), involved in an apology for the French variation of the garden city, whose leading figures were Donat Alfred Agache (1875–1959) and his disciple Étiènne de Gröer (1882–1952), both of whom received commissions from the city of Lisbon, with the latter actually spending some years living in the Portuguese capital. Among the first two generations of Portuguese modern architects, attention is drawn in particular to Pardal Monteiro and Carlos Ramos, who were closer to the *constructive* model, or Jorge Segurado (1898–1990) and Cassiano Branco, who were closer to the *école de Paris*, with Keil do Amaral being more closely linked to Dudok, and Faria da Costa to the French models of the garden city.

As has been said, after the war and within a very short space of time, the predominant trend was towards radical modernity, which was now embraced by most of the third generation of Portuguese (and Lisbon) architects, both through the direct influence of the work of Le Corbusier himself and the influence of the Corbusian strain of Brazilian modern architecture, especially that of Rio de Janeiro, via *Brazil Builds*[9], whose doctrine had been developed by Lucio Costa (1902–1998) and whose leading proponents, among others, were Oscar Niemeyer (1907–2012) and Affonso Eduardo Reidy (1909–1964). It should, however, be remembered that, in the late 1930s and even during the war itself, Lisbon was a constant destination of many of the writings of the Swiss-French master, and as soon as 1945, of the *Brazil Builds* catalogue (1943), almost always through Nuno Teotónio Pereira (1922–2016). On the one hand, Le Corbusier represented the *nouveau temps*, which was synonymous with the adherence to the radical modernity that, for many architects, seemed a crucial recourse to the emancipation of Portuguese architecture from the nationalistic coerciveness of the *Estado Novo* but also, it should be stressed, from the burden of the moderate modernity of the previous generations, who were still being celebrated at the 1948 Lisbon exhibition of *15 Years of Public Works*. On the other hand, modern Brazil was the great novelty after 1945, fascinating the architects through its ample array of buildings, whose singularity also derived from the notion of a "modern and Brazilian" inevitability. For the new Lisbon (and Portuguese) modernity, besides the obvious socio-cultural connotations, such fascination and the same pretext were also invoked in order to cement its affirmation. It should be said that the initial adherence to this singular modernity was more akin to the *purisme* than to the *béton brut* of the Swiss-French master, incorporating some of the plasticity and the non-canonical requirements of the modernity of Rio de Janeiro, together with the resolute social determination to provide "housing for all" and to achieve an overall sense of urbanism through reference to the *Ville Radieuse* (1935) and the *Charte d'Athènes* (1943). Concomitantly, throughout the 1950s, there was another modern path, possibly linked to the debates of the Parisian *Maison de la Culture*, founded by the writer Louis Aragon (1897–1982) in 1936 in the context of the *Front Populaire* (1936–38), which enunciated an art and architecture that originated from popular tradition and were intelligible to ordinary people, induced by socialist realism and recontextualising the regionalism and the cultivation of folklore that, for endogenous reasons, had a powerful impact in postwar Italy. In 1947, Keil do Amaral proposed a survey of popular architecture that, with the paradoxical support of the government, was to actually take place between 1955 and 1961, when it was finally published. The criticism of radical modernity that was implicit in this path was later to be joined by other critical stances, most immediately those that had been formed within CIAM itself, in which the Portuguese architects participated from 1951 onwards. Many of the young Lisbon (and Portuguese) architects, from both the third and the fourth modern generations, were (greatly) influenced by the neo-realism of the newly developed Italian architectural culture, but also by the rediscovery of Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959), Alvar Aalto (1898–1976) and the more temperate Nordic modernity, and, finally, by the effervescent world of British architecture and urbanism. Also to be found following this same path were the last works of Le Corbusier, those of his *béton brut* and *lyrisme* period. Nuno Portas (1934–), the leading figure in the first approach to the history of modern architecture in Portugal and the driving force behind the Portuguese criticism of the "modern orthodoxy" in the late 1950s[10], spoke of the two models of the postwar generations as being "French-Brazilian" and "Italian-Nordic" which, to some extent and somewhat ironically, reflected the hesitation of the regime's foreign policy in the late 1950s and early 1960s,

between choosing to follow its Atlantic vocation or drawing closer to Europe, at a time when the *Estado Novo* was caught in the throes of an internal crisis. In short, as Ricardo Carvalho states quite clearly in his essay, "in the 1950s, when the social, aesthetic and technological assumptions of the Modern Movement seemed to be consolidated, there was hesitation in Portugal. Two possibilities were open to what could be viewed as a postwar understanding of modernity. Some architects focused on the possible confrontation between the heritage of tradition and avant-garde proposals, in tune with international movements. Others assimilated the universal appeal of the Modern Movement and aimed to operate within those contexts, facing the shortage of technological tools and of scarce theoretical production". It would be wearisome to list here the Lisbon architects of the first two postwar generations that followed either one or the other of these paths, although it is clear that some switched from the "French-Brazilian" to the "Italian-Nordic" path while there were yet others who followed them both, sometimes mixing them together in the same work. While Ruy Jervis d'Athouguia, Alberto Pessoa, Pedro Cid, Vítor Palla (1922–2006) and Joaquim Bento de Almeida (1918–1997) were closer to the first of these paths, Francisco Conceição Silva (1922–1982), Maurício de Vasconcelos (1925–1977), Sebastião Formosinho Sanchez (1922–2004) and even Nuno Teotónio Pereira evolved from this same path to the "Italian-Nordic" one, with Manuel Tainha (1922–2012) and Vítor Figueiredo (1929–2004) perhaps being more closely bound to the latter one. Raul Chorão Ramalho (1914–2002) was quite unique in his combination of the two models and José Rafael Botelho and, above all, Nuno Portas were more decisively attached to the second one. In the context of the current issue of this *Journal*, greater prominence is clearly given to the first ones with Pessoa's complex of *Infante Santo* Avenue, Athouguia's work, and the very building of the headquarters of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation itself. The second model gave rise to the Chelas Urban Plan, which denoted a clearly British influence.

To conclude this introduction, it should be said that some of these considerations and observations are not canonical or, in other words, that they occasionally deviate from the general direction followed by the historiography of Portuguese architecture in the 20th century, even though, in critical terms, they are firmly anchored within these. Furthermore, they do not always coincide with the contents of some of the essays presented here, allowing for a crossover and salutary comparison of different approaches. Nonetheless, we suppose that they help to clarify the purposes of this issue of the *Journal* dedicated to the modern architecture of Lisbon, highlighting its heritage importance and its singularity when compared with other modernities elsewhere, as well as complementing the general overview that was provided on the occasion of the *14th Conference of* **docomomo** *International*.

Welcome to modern Lisbon.

Notes

1 There are generally considered to be four successive generations of Portuguese modern architects. The first pioneering generation comprises those born around 1900, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, who graduated immediately after the WWI (1914–18), such as Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, Jorge Segurado, Luís Cristino da Silva, José Cottinelli Telmo (1897–1948) and Viriato Cassiano Branco. The second generation comprises those born around 1910, during the transition from the monarchy to the Portuguese republic, almost all of whom graduated in the 1930s, such as João Guilherme Faria da Costa and Francisco Keil do Amaral. The third generation comprises those born around 1920, more or less immediately after the WWI, almost all of whom graduated in the late 1940s and early 1950s, including, among many others, Ruy Jervis d'Athouguia, Alberto Pessoa, Joaquim Bento de Almeida, Vítor Palla, Francisco Conceição Silva, Maurício de Vasconcelos, Nuno Teotónio Pereira, Pedro Cid and José Rafael Botelho. The fourth generation comprises those born around 1930, at the time when the *Estado Novo* was being installed, almost all of whom graduated in the late 1950s and early 1960s, such as Nuno Portas, Vítor Figueiredo and Francisco Silva Dias.

2 For the most recent and complete study on Portuguese modern architecture, see: Ana Tostões, *A Idade Maior, Cultura e Tecnologia na Arquitectura Moderna Portuguesa*, Porto, FAUP, 2015.

3 The idea of "radical modernity" has been retained, this being the expression that Kenneth Frampton used to characterise the modern avant-garde movements that took part in the first *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (1928–59), in order to be able to consider other modernities that existed during this period and the following ones. See Kenneth Frampton, "Foreword", in Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928–1960*, Cambridge and London, MIT Press, 2000, XI–XV.

4 With the architects Francisco da Silva Dias, João Reis Machado, Alfredo Silva Gomes, Luís Vassalo Rosa, Carlos Worm and the engineers José Simões Coelho and Gonçalo Malheiro de Araújo.

5 Coordinated by José Sommer Ribeiro, Pedro Falcão e Cunha and the engineer Luís Guimarães Lobato.

6 Coordinated by José Rafael Botelho and Carlos Duarte.

7 Mention should also be made of the *Réunions Internationales d'Architectes* (RIA, 1932–48), organised through the auspices of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, all of which were attended by Portuguese architects. Founded by Pierre Vago (1910–2002), the editor in chief of the French magazine from 1932 onwards, these meetings promoted study trips and working sessions for architects with modern tendencies, at the same time seeking an alternative third way to the academic approach and CIAM. The first meeting took place in the USSR (and Poland) in 1932, the second in Italy in 1933 and the third in Czechoslovakia (with Hungary and Austria) in 1935. In 1937, the fourth RIA was held during the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* in Paris, alongside CIAM V. The fifth meeting, planned for the Scandinavian countries, was rendered unviable by the outbreak of the WWII. After the war, in 1948, RIA merged with the *Union Internationale des Architectes* (UIA, 1948-). It should be noted that, besides being a correspondent of the French magazine, Porfírio Pardal Monteiro was the Portuguese delegate to RIA, as well as the co-founder of UIA.

8 The generic concept of "moderate modernity" is employed as a counterpoint to the expression "radical modernity", as used by Jean-Louis Cohen when referring to RIA — "they would develop a more moderate programme that was generally less radical than the views of most members of CIAM" — thus providing a framework for other sensitivities that contributed to the affirmation of the European Modern Movement, as well as the vanguards. See Jean-Louis Cohen, *France, Modern Architectures in History*, London, Reaktion, 2015, 92.

9 We are referring to the Brazilian modern architecture exhibited at or subsidiary to the exhibition *Brazil Builds, Architecture New and Old, 1652–1942* held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1943 and curated by Philip Goodwin (1885–1952) in collaboration with George Kidder Smith (1913–1997). This later became an itinerant exhibition and was disseminated worldwide through the respective catalogue, especially after the WWII.

10 See Nuno Portas, *A Arquitectura para Hoje*, seguido de *Evolução da Arquitectura Moderna em Portugal*, Lisbon, Livros Horizonte, 2008.

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