

TRANSLATIONS

LIVING GEOGRAPHIES

It is only natural that we understand that western culture has inherited from its own roots its vision of the world as if it were a big city and of the city as the space of representation of that vision.

The inscription of that inheritance in the current cosmopolitan condition leads us to place the notion of the territory in a more abstract context, at times severed from the landscape, and the latter ending up being discriminated against and relegated to a peripheral condition between and outside the cities.

In these circumstances, the landscape is (mis)understood, and is condemned to an existence as a residual and, at the same time, natural void, symbolically resistant to the city and all that is not natural, the artificial, human fabrication...

However, the territory is also a product of that fabrication, fully assuming its role as a mediating platform between man and the environment, becoming both city and landscape at the same time.

The 6th Sao Paulo Biennale focuses on urban living, on the city and its reality, or perhaps its fiction. In a more inclusive reading of that theme – where living in the city is also living in the territory – it is of interest to incorporate the dimension of the landscape, which plays an active role in the development of today's cities.

The range of the projects selected – some of them built, some of them works in progress and others involuntarily condemned to the realm of fiction – seems to reflect a more comprehensive and more territorial condition, an interpretation of living that recognises not only diversified scopes or scales but also distinct contexts.

They act, in accordance with this much broader reading, on the territory and not merely on the more immediate context.

They thus reflect, irrespective of their respective particular conditions, the will to re-centre the architectural discourse on the city and to exercise its capacity of intervention in it, proposing new relationships and enabling new readings of the context, using it as material in itself and thus reinforcing its territorial character.

In this sense, it is impossible to dissociate architecture from the landscaping dimension and from the diachronic dimension itself, given that, in addition to acting in the space it also acts in time, playing a role in the slow transformation of the contexts and of urbanity itself.

It is its inscription in this complex system – the city is, indeed, the most complex manifestation of a culture – that dilutes the importance of its objectual conditions so that one can understand the "geographic" meaning of the architectural object as an active part of that system.

The concept of live geography results from that "geographic" meaning.

Cities are sedimentary, long-term structures, reflecting the duplicity of phenomena such as resistance to transformation and the need for regeneration, whose origins, being practically one and the same, reside in the preservation of its physical and cultural identity.

These phenomena systematically affect the life of the contemporary city, to the extent that they are the assertion of symptoms that have to do with the city's own vulnerability.

Vulnerability, as one of the most exposed aspects in the current condition of cities, ends up taking on the role of a potential regenerator and architecture has an active part in that process.

In this sense, architecture can represent the sediment, the will to integrate that process that is more dilated in time.

That condition underlines not its self-referentiality but the relational system between objects, which translates in the relational space, the empty spaces where citizenship is exercised and where the city attains its real meaning.

That meaning – the product of the alternation of times, wills and resources – mirrors a complex system that recognises – upstream, the dialectics of the technical and political levels and the decision level, a fundamental stage between thinking of and making the city.

The city is a dynamic, and therefore living, phenomenon. It is a stage for the most complex interactions, where architecture acts as a transforming agent, operating on aspects of vulnerability always in favour of the progressive dimension which still has to compete, above all in Europe, with the vision of the city as an institution where the weight of the historic past is the only guarantee of stability or permanence.

The projects presented here seek to illustrate the dynamic and regenerating capacity that counters the static vision of time and urbanity, daring to accept temporality instead of time, and thus play a discreet role in the slow transformation of the city or, in the broader sense, the territory.

And for this reason, one is of the opinion that the contribution that these projects can or could have is the capacity of intervention, the construction of structuring presences, interacting in the live geographies and, above all, taking part in them, injecting vitality and provoking reactions.

Those reactions are, however, not predictable, but that is one of the conditions of the work of contemporary architecture: allowing for openness as to its own interpretation.

Marco Buinhas

Conversation with Jorge Sampaio

*President of the Portuguese Republic
from 1996 – 2006
Born in Lisbon in 1939. Lawyer. Mayor
of Lisbon from 1989 to 1995, the period
in which Gonçalo Byrne drew up
the Detail Plan for Ajuda.*

GB First of all I would like to thank you for granting me this opportunity to talk with you. I am very interested in your opinion on questions that go beyond the strict scope of the practice of architecture.

The projects to be shown at the Sao Paulo Biennale are a selection of the works we have carried out focusing mainly on the urban component, the city.

The project was not [centred] on the discussion of the object, but above all on questions of the public space, the relational space between buildings.

It is our view that the city is made in those spaces, where the citizens are able to come together and participate and intervene in the life of the cities. Cities are precisely receptacles of life. And for a city to be alive, it has to be open to transformation; and to transform it, we need plans and projects.

In Portugal, the general spectrum has undergone considerable evolution, although there is a history of projects of bad quality and, above all, high degrees of speculation.

But that should not threaten the culture of the plan, of the project – a threat that unfortunately has been stimulated in the

media using demagogic and populist means that contradict democratic participation itself, because they do not even create spaces of discussion or participation.

We are aware not only of your many years of experience of Mayor of Lisbon, or Prefect as they say in Brazil, but the light your experience can shine on the of the relations between politics, projects and the city. The first issue I would like to hear your opinion on is precisely that.

JS First of all, allow me to say that is a pleasure for me to take part in this debate and I would like to send my greetings to all the architects and urban planners participating in the Biennale.

As far as the question you raised is concerned, I would begin by referring to the growing urbanisation trend in Portugal, an inescapable development in the last one hundred years that will no doubt continue.

People seek out life in the city. I agree that the city is, above all, made up of the people. The present moment – a reflection of globalisation – demands that the city should not be a space of exclusion, but rather a space of coming together, of sharing. Without that, democracy is not viable and it is precisely such situations that populist movements use to their advantage.

In order to make that coming together possible – and I have learnt much in this respect from architects – we need, first and foremost, political power of decision in that field and I exercised that power at a time in which a renewal of the objectives of the city was necessary. It is necessary to muster

political strength and add to it the culture from the various professional disciplines dedicated to the city. By this, I mean the town planners and architects, the sociologists, the infrastructure and transportation people and all those who make the city, with no exclusions.

The connection between political power and the city legitimises and amplifies the change or [sustains] the form of conserving what is “conservable” – I say this without any notion of revisionism. And associating change to what which, in my opinion, is the eternal aspiration of all of us living better together; living with what in Barcelona in the 1960s they termed “patriotism of the city”, which translates to an idea of “let’s make this a better city”. The strength of political power must be rooted in the active participation of the citizens.

At the same time, a city must have a strategic plan and not a fictional one – a strategy that is voted on, constantly reassessed and open to the incorporation of new situations, but always with one objective only.

The city must be “wanted” and, obviously, that is not possible in time frames of six months; it has to be ten or twenty years. The “wanting” must have sustainability because the public opinion has to come out and say: “this is about us, we want to be involved”.

There is also the third aspect I mentioned: transparency.

I do not conceive election campaigns for city councils – or for cities, if you prefer – without discussing the city ten years from now, and the path we have to take to get there has a lot to do with that same knowledge.

Transparency is essential because, in the short term and with the contradictions that we are aware of in the cities, the dialectics is broken down, and specific interests and lobbies prevail, which rapidly triumph over the political power willing to succumb. But it is evident that there are interests that triumph, but only those that determine direction or orientation.

The cities are the most important centre of political decision making, because everything goes through the city: immigration and ghettos, the immigrant communities which, in the case of Lisbon, generate a city with the capacity to accommodate ethnicities and religions. It has been that way for centuries and will always be that way; it is a city that does not hide, does not conceal.

The politically able city is a city that has a legitimised political power and a competent public opinion. It cannot be a conservative city. The conservative city stagnates and loses in competitive terms.

A city only lives if it is permanently on a conquest mission, if it seeks out the new and shows competitiveness. Today, if a city is not competitive, there is no project dimension to be transmitted to the citizens and they rapidly lose interest.

GB I would like to come back to an aspect you mentioned just now that is both topical and of extreme importance – the idea of economic geography. The cities are now the great centres of production and must no longer be seen as historic centres but as metropolitan areas, whose critical mass is

based on services, tourism, mobility and the new technologies – all things that generate wealth. This idea brings us to the question of competition between the cities, also touching on the questions of mobility between cities and the phenomenon of globalisation itself.

You mentioned the need for a strategic vision of the city and that is a long-term vision. In recent years, we have witnessed a phenomenon that has a lot to do with that vision, but which in reality translates to periods of election-based alternation – four-year cycles, which, generally speaking, impoverish the whole perspective of the city at the political level. The perspective of a long-term vision is exchanged for a short-term one, and this rapidly becomes a risk, because it comes closer to immediate interests that are often contrary to the city’s sedimentation process itself.

JS I couldn’t agree more. That is the great dilemma of our times, one of the problems of democracy that is immediately reflected in our cities. It is a general problem – and even a worldwide one – raising the question of the possibility of congregating political force, even if the power is disputed on an alternating basis, with a view to implementing programme and achieving objectives that transcend the normal mandate period.

The four years of office are, in reality, only two because, as we insiders say, the first year is for learning, the second is for planning, the third is for doing and the last year is for showing results. So, it is a very short cycle

for being able to compete in qualitative terms. But I don’t think it’s impossible. There are examples where one manages to create a public opinion that sustains a certain orientation.

Normally, this requires a lengthy period of democratic tradition but we have to nourish the hope that it will become frequent, never confusing the need for participation with the systematic blocking by minorities, which, though respectable, often do not fit into the more global aspirations. That is where the question of compromises, pacts comes in, and I am a fervent defender of these.

It is not possible to get to grips with a city if there is not a minimum dimension of ten years. Ten years normally mean two and a half terms of office – the French have a term of six years for town councils; the Portuguese, Spanish and Brazilians have four years.

Alternation is, on the other hand, one form of combating lack of ideas or the usual habits, or even vices, inherent in getting used to power. I believe that the only way of allaying the various political forces is to find common platforms that offer a guarantee of continuity even in situations of political alternation.

GB It is certainly not enough to get good projects together if one lacks strategic principles on which the projects are based and which guarantee their implementation. It is the strategy that arises from a more comprehensive will and, in turn, the very concept of sustainability of the idea. Sustainability belongs to the domain of concepts and can reflect, from the outset, a little of the need for a long period of time.

PORT OF LISBON TRAFFIC CONTROL TOWER LISBON, PORTUGAL

To control you must dominate

Due to its function and the geographic position it occupies, this building assumes an exceptional presence in the relationship between the city of Lisbon and the River Tagus.

It risks ritualizing the entrance to the city via the river, where its dominant verticality is suggestive of the theme of control that gave rise to it.

That relationship aims at dominating the horizontal dimension, the dimension of the horizon and the sea, and of the water with which it is intimately connected, which is indeed the site of the activities to be controlled. It’s dominating vertical line also ritualizes the relationship between the land and the air – the vertical dimension of the land that rises up to the sky.

The intermediate dimension is that of movement, representing the dynamics of the form, the tension of the relationship between the land and the sea.

A rooted element, the tower assertively joins the ranks of other symbolic constructions which, down through the centuries, have occupied the river front in Lisbon, from the mouth of the Tagus to the Vasco da Gama Bridge.

JS The only form of resistance – inflecting the negative consequences of globalisation – is to find democratic forms that facilitate decision making in short or medium-term regimes. Haste systematically conflicts with the sustainability of a certain orientation and, for that reason, greater flexibility between the strategy and participation levels will be necessary. At any rate, this will take some time and we will not be able to [establish] anything without compromises. As long as they are not compromises that benefit a particular group – the so-called perks of power – but compromises for the good of the city and its citizens.

This, of course, means eliminating as much as possible disillusion and social discrimination, bringing the minorities into the development process. Each country has its own problems, but one can witness similar problems all over, though they may diverge in terms of level and intensity.

The idea that the city is a continuum and we have to give life and coherence to these various continuums has become a fixed one.

The idea of the return to the country is not a viable one. Our obligation is to discover the means for rural development, which has become a recent concern in Europe and also a more and more important one.

We cannot have dehumanised cities, and there is a risk that that's what we might end up having – cities that offer no more than functional support for the fundamental life trajectory of the citizen. Therefore, either we transform the dormitories into centres and invert the process, giving them their own transport, education, training and cultural

production networks, or we are heading towards very difficult and increasingly problematic cities, in which safety will also be at risk. Social stratification is so strong and so grave that lack of safety ends up being inevitable.

So, either we understand that and bring the property developers to see that as well – and I agree that that is a very difficult task – or we will be perpetuating the cycle.

GB Those are aspects common to the whole western world.

That phenomenon can no longer be distinguished geographically because the geo-strategy itself has also changed and it is exactly that phenomenon that increasingly precipitates the weakening of the public administration as a developer.

That weakening process is more and more noticeable in the neo-liberal climate of our current society, justifying even the entrance of the private interests as an economic driving force, which, being difficult for the city to digest, are today a very important factor in the development of the city.

In Italy I attended the presentation of a series of implemented plans given the name of "PPPs" (Public and Private Partnerships). They are very complex logics but they may represent an open process of evolution and learning.

JS But in which the public/private partnership presents the possibility of the public interest being a decisive factor. The State has to participate less in certain things, but there fields in which the public interest

has to be safeguarded. The public interest is vaster than it was one hundred years ago, because protection against insecurity, and questions relating to the public space, employment, mobility, family life and education are challenges and condition the true capacity to produce, to enter the economic circuits. Everything, in the final analysis, has a certain amount of public interest. Even if it is about the concession of electricity distribution or television broadcasting or concessions for whatever you like: who is going to regulate that?

I don't think it's possible to take the State of the equation, on the contrary... It is increasingly evident that we have need a state that plays a more regulatory role in your work and in that of the professionals from the various other areas that work with you and make the city. This, too, calls for a political decision maker with cultural value and dimension that understands that the city is culture, variety, controversy, dialectics... The city is all that, plus the capacity to amass know-how. It is more than evident that everything from sociology to psychology, from transport to health and from the environment to sustainability helps.

Today we politicians are too small and unknowing to think of ourselves as enlightened. The citizen is much more critical and the durability of a politician is unpredictable. That forces us to cultivate more openness and other capacities.

GB Today's cultural complexity, which is traditionally deep rooted, gives rise to the old debate between conservation

and transformation of the cities, between "heritage-ism" as an expression of identity and the need for change, for adaptation, for improvement, for a project vision as a transforming vision - and this situation gives rise to the culture shock. It would seem legitimate, for no one is lord over the truth or certainty. There are no more dogmas as to the forms of action.

Today, the search for a cultural dimension is part of a permanent quest, a process of almost investigation and, at the same time, experimentalism.

In this context of sudden changes, we are witnessing, for example, a very European situation of excess of conservatism. An American architect said: "You in Europe have a terrible thing, which is the excessive importance of the heritage because it has a staticising effect. And we see, for example the question of the cities in Italy, where there is such a heavy load of historicism that it often threatens the very survival of the historic centres".

We are also witnessing radical change in terms of migration and immigration, new populations entering the large cities. This phenomenon is particularly patent in Lisbon. It is interesting to observe, in the case of Lisbon, where the urban expansion, which always favoured the Cacém and Sintra railway line, is spreading on the South bank of the Tagus, to Montijo, Alcochete, etc.

Empty nuclei are being created in central residential areas that are, to a large extent, being filled by immigrants from Eastern European countries and by Africans,

who, because of their longer immigration tradition, become more fixed residents. This interesting question has to do with the balances generated between the need for recognising an identity [for Lisbon] – which is fundamental in the European context – and the contemporary registration of that same identity. I believe that one of the problems of the built heritage management must be seen in a contemporary perspective of identity and, therefore, knowing how to reassess it. This question becomes critical from the political point of view, because it often leads one to take options...

JS That is the most difficult level. Perhaps it would be interesting to finish off with this question, where the political decision maker faces a difficult decision. If we have a building threatening to collapse, what do we do with it? The answer includes an economic dimension and public monies are limited. There are no permanent private sponsorship funds, right? Without investment, how can a trade off be possible? Where can one incorporate the possibility of understanding what our identity was and the most recent contributions made to composing that identity?

Lisbon is a good example because we have historic neighbourhoods that are delimited and identified. But we also have to know who to renew them. How?

There is a European tradition that says that the better off seek out the centres to live in, pushing the poorer out to the periphery. It is exactly the contrary trend to that of up to a few years ago. Therefore, the decisions,

in a general perspective, can be made with greater ease. There are very difficult concrete cases and, obviously, the heritage dimension is not static.

Conversation with Vittorio Gregotti

Architect since 1952.

Born in 1927 em Novara, Italy. A member of the Tendenza generation. Director of Rassegna and Casabella during the 1980s and 1990s. An architectural thinker and theorist, his ideas on territory have profoundly influenced the work of Gonçalo Byrne.

GB I explained the objective and theme of our exhibition at the VI Biennale of Sao Paulo, for which we selected six medium and large-scale projects. In one of them, the central theme is that of the tower as an object, where the architecture is rapidly transformed into an autonomous element. In the others, the theme of the "void" allows us to understand the structure of the relationship between different objects that define the public space or even the landscape, as in the case of the project

Similar to these works, and indeed assuming its inheritance from them, the Traffic Control Tower dares to represent its time, leaving its mark on the river bank.

Its nature will always be that of an earth element, an object that progressively dematerializes, born out of the solidity of the stone, clad in its copper covering, to be finished off in the lightness and transparency of the glass and, finally, the Hertzian waves that only the antennas understand.

REMODELLING OF THE AREA SURROUNDING THE MONASTERY OF SANTA MARIA DE ALCOBAÇA, PORTUGAL

An immense void. An ample square in front of the main façade.

Understanding the current configuration of the town of Alcobaca and its main square means understanding not only the genesis of its Cistercian Abbey but also the relationship

for Forlanini Park in Milan. What is your take on the importance of the public space and the landscape as leading elements in architecture?

VG We were also invited to take part in the VI Sao Paulo Biennale and submitted five large-scale projects. Our proposal, different from yours, was demonstrating the disparity between Europe and the Far East and understanding what the differences are and whether or not our destiny is close to that of other cultures. We can also look at differences in the relationship between the architect, the building and the public space, as well as the relative importance of each of these parts.

In the case of countries outside the European space, and in particular of the Far Eastern countries, one can witness the results of an impetuous and extremely violent capitalist expansion, of a direct capitalism – if not to say “fascism” because that would not look good – in which, in the space of twenty years, the situation was completely turned around.

Cities like Shanghai and Beijing have, for example, some 15 to 18 million inhabitants... Just to give us an idea, Beijing has the same number of inhabitants as the whole of Belgium. This means that, if we build large modern buildings – skyscrapers or large-dimension commercial spaces – in quantities of 4,000 or 5,000 units, the public space is no longer taken into consideration and the protagonism is taken over by the large infra-structures, mainly the road and rail structures. The importance of

the public space thus resides in the private areas of large-scale shopping spaces or the large railway, road and airport interfaces. But privatisation of the public space is a phenomenon that we are also seeing in Europe, raising questions as to the interest of the public space – somewhat similar to the interest of architecture as a singular object, which we are gradually losing. That is the true difficulty.

Even so, the discourse in Europe is a very different one. It comes out as a defender of the historic tradition, of the densification of the urban network. This is because we have medium-sized cities which, with the exception of Paris and London – the only real metropolises – are of a perfectly manageable dimension.

In the European city we can also witness two problems. The first is the extra-urban expansion, similar to the mutation of the periphery in the American context, though in Europe we don't have the same availability of open space, and that fact systematically brings with it a high degree of destruction of the landscape. The second is the discourse of the privatisation of the public space in the terms referred to above, or the consideration of the public space as an element of no social interest. These are currently the two major obstacles, the big issues.

On the other hand, urban design theory, being responsible for the relationship between objects and for the open space, represents one of the radical defenders of the modernist tradition, even if it is interpreted in a more up-to-date sense. It is a defence against the idea of the isolated

object – which rapidly becomes transformed into a “bizarre” object. The reaction against this type of element and, above all, the interest in the relational space between the parts, is that which we also endeavour to demonstrate through certain projects, some with better results than others. But it is a trend, an interest, that I know you have too and it is, generally speaking, a reflex of the “Portuguese school”.

GB The “Portuguese School” and, in particular, the architecture of Álvaro Siza, always exercised, albeit on a reduced scale, the capacity to ally strong plasticity and a very particular landscaping sensitivity. Not so much for designing the landscape in the broader sense, but for constructing his take on a sensitivity that was already there in our spontaneous or vernacular architecture, our old architecture, our way of doing landscaping.

VG That brings us to an interesting topic: the concept of landscape. “Landscape” is a very general term, but it is the only one that brings us to understand the physical aspects of the image of the constructed and the non-constructed without differentiating between the parts.

The European landscape is one constructed voluntarily, whether it has given rise to a wood or a city. Even so, it manages to preserve, within itself, the concept of landscape, the articulation of landscape, the possibility of housing a broad variety within it, and that is an extremely difficult task.

In Italy, for example, that concept of landscape has only been conserved in the centre in a particularly recognisable form. From the pictorial culture of the *Quattrocento* to today, there has always been a compromise between the natural and the constructed: the trees, the alterations and the public space, which constitute, naturally, the construction of a truly cultural landscape. Because the landscape, in a more European sense, is always a cultural landscape and the natural is only one of the various elements in its construction.

GB It is a material, a design matter. And in its design, in its transformation, there are differences between us architects, who are prepared to work with “materials” that are substantially inert, and the landscape designers, who work on the landscape as derived from botany, from the organic. The main difference is that the latter are qualified to work with live material. When a park is designed, and that park is constructed, it is only later that one understands the design.

Then there is another interesting subject, which is the way in which those “materials” relate to the architecture itself. This can represent, similar to what happens with light, a new concession to the presence of time. Because the landscape introduces a time dimension that we do not have with inert material, even allowing for the ageing process.

VG The landscape functions as a praise of “slow” time, just as current reality celebrates our obsession with speed. The idea of

working on landscape at the territorial scale – perceived as landscape and not as geography or antropogeography – is a topic of great interest, evidently on different scales.

To go back to what you were saying just now, about the small scale in Álvaro Siza's work and in that of many of you in Portugal, the dimension is not important at all: one can work from the landscape point of view in very diminutive spaces, even in micro-landscapes.

In any case, it is the point of view that counts. By that I mean the relationship between the things, between the materials, including natural and artificial materials and even the dialectics between them, which would seem to be one of the fundamental elements in landscape, but also in architecture.

GB That topic is also interesting when we relate it to a European vision, speaking, above all, of an architecture both in terms of spatiality and temporality, understanding to what point architecture, which is a form of knowledge, carries within itself a temporality, because architecture is also a wish to contain life – be it a building, a road or an urban space.

There is a text by Rafael Moneo in which he says that each building has its own life, not in the organic sense, but precisely in the sense of evolution of time. Extrapolating from this a little, a city also has its own life, because there is always a relationship with the lives of those who act in it and with the diachrony of time. This idea has been disappearing in the “instant” architecture of today, the architecture which is termed

ephemeral but in reality is not, because in architecture a life is always present.

VG Absolutely. The long duration – that permanence that Braudel termed the “longue durée” – is a key element in the work of the architect. We must think, even if only metaphorically, of eternity. Our work may be destroyed, altered, transformed, used in a different way later; but the idea of a long time is always there underneath that of “slow” time, which I referred to earlier.

A city cannot be built in five minutes... It takes centuries and for that to happen, a great deal of attention must be paid to a certain idea of simplicity, clarity.

The clearer a thing is the more accessible it becomes for the social imagination. Life should always be able to unfold in the interior in diverse forms. It is not true that to make flexible architecture you have to show physical flexibility. On the contrary, you have to show great clarity and it is within that clarity that a variety of things are possible.

GB Especially when allowing for a capacity of adaptation to life is inherent in the durability, hence also accepting transformation...

VG Of course. Old architecture always had that. We use old buildings for completely alien uses and they respond with this idea of “durability”, which goes way beyond the idea of functionality itself. That does not mean that we should not design a project functionally or technologically correctly. But those factors always relate to the design moment and afterwards, with use, the building becomes

of its creation with the territory, its development, interaction and even modification down through the centuries.

The project seeks to liberate the relationship of complementarity between the town and the monastery, bringing the two closer together in the area surrounding the monument and proposing the concretization of that relationship in the town's monumental main square.

The design options made have always sought to accentuate the immanent character of the pre-existing elements in relation to the content of the new programme. This was achieved discreetly, placing the new support and services spaces on the sides, as well as the systems and networks necessary for their diverse functions.

The new materials were chosen with a view to emphasising a certain hieratic despoilment that is subjacent in Cistercian architecture, where working with natural light was both systematic and all-important.

It is indeed in the light, architecture's raw material par excellence, and in its revealing/epiphanic quality that the bond between time and space resides. It is above all the light that introduces the sequentialness, the alternation, the diachronism of time.

The truth is that the signs left by time have revealed, in that magnificent space, some of the coherences lost and even some of the intrusive processes it was subject to, which the project has dared to correct.

very different, changes. However, it is important to think of the "longue durée". I think that we are already living in a society of the future; a very strange one at that.

It is very strange that it is simultaneously a society of the future and yet rejects the idea of utopia. Today, it is merely technological and the future is a kind of "technical forecast". The model is always an economic one and economy functions on the short term; but the time for the construction of a city is not short; it is long and we have to bear that in mind.

GB One should not forget that forecasts often are very wrong, and that they can be interpreted in more ways than one. That aspect calls another statement by Rafael Moneo to mind, when he said that when a building is completed and opened, it is abandoned to an enormous solitude because it is left alone in its confrontation with life and time.

VG There's no other way. That solitude is also the availability for diversification of use. That's what scares me about these large-scale expansions in Singapore, Korea and even in Japan and China. It scares me because the interest in development concentrates on the idea of management to the detriment of form. Form doesn't count; it's all about management, which forces a discussion of the ontological dimension of architecture, questions its very essence. Maybe architecture no longer serves us; maybe in the future we will have "no occupation".

It is possible that the profession of architect will disappear, just as swordmakers have disappeared – an obsolete and extinct profession. These are fundamental conditions that are at the basis of the exercise of architecture, of considering this poetic constructing as a fundamental element.

If we can't do it that way, that means that we're no use anymore. I would be very sad if that happened, but I will continue to fight for architecture to go on and we'll see what happens.

Conversation with João Nunes

Landscape designer since 1985.

Born in Lisbon in 1960. Founder of PROAP, a company specialising in landscaping studies and projects. Co-designer of the project for Forlanini Park, Milan, Italy.

GB From the architect's point of view, the Forlanini Park Project in Milan is a situation in which the protagonist is the void, the empty space, which, due to its extended dimension, functions as a connecting element between the compact city – the

city we call historic, a strip of Milan with a fabric of 19th century blocks – and the transition part, delimited by a first railway wall. The wall in turn delimits the compact city from another territory that is completely fragmentary and dispersed, where there are still remnants of farms, with watering channel systems marking a certain presence. There are also large-scale infrastructures such as motorway viaducts crossing the site and an airport terminal, meaning that the presence of airplanes is a given in the landscape.

From the design point of view, it is both a very typical and very rich situation, because the architecture used on a grand scale seeks to introduce relationships and qualities that did not exist on the site and are fundamental for characterising this large urban facility and incorporating it into the city of Milan. I think that, from the landscape design point of view, one works with different materials, adding vital and fundamental facets to the project...

JN Landscape Design and Architecture speak of the same things – of the leaving of signs, i.e. the marks left by gestures or actions that relate to the survival of communities. The rules for the two are the same and the landscape without buildings, rural territory for example, is made up using processes that are rigorously the same as those applied to the construction of any city.

In the concrete case of Forlanini Park, the territory is structured, in accordance with our proposal, using constructed elements of great presence and great formal value, with very expressive values, which are integrated in the interstitial spaces of a built fabric lacking structure. They end up becoming

more important in defining a structure than the buildings themselves.

However, these elements are constructed with the material vocabulary of the country, of a park – land, trees, bushes, grass, and water.

The strategy is to make full use of a non-structuring territory, the space between buildings, the habitual field of the landscape designer, without any irony. Through intervention in these leftover spaces, this forgotten land, we can implant a structuring fabric.

The area of intervention is a void, a void isolated from the city by the presence of very dynamic and very imposing infrastructures that leave very strong imprints on the territory. The project strategy was based on creating the conditions for celebrating that void and for habitating that forgotten space.

To describe it as a void is not really appropriate because in many ways it is a very rich space. For example, the signs, very recent and very much alive, left by the forms of constructing and working the land in the rural tradition of the periphery of Milan, with its large-scale land modelling operations.

This tradition means that the whole territory surrounding the city is dotted with signs – related with water management, which is available in excess in winter and is lacking in summer –, signs that are very clearly recognisable in the park land and which we have sought to bring into the design discourse itself.

Around that void, which constitutes the central space of the park, the intervention area includes a peripheral strip in which many different realities coexist in a territory

that is considerably built up but lacking in structuring. It consists of fragments, haphazard building, which, through our design, we have endeavoured to structure with the insertion of the aforementioned structuring elements.

I think this is a very interesting action as it constructs a structured and structuring fabric with urban characteristics, but the construction is carried out with the materials and vocabulary of a park.

GB Of particular interest is the group of existing systems – the rivers, canals, the local fauna itself – which interrelate. Nevertheless, they have been subject to very intense erosion and pollution processes. It is interesting to try and determine to what extent it is possible to regenerate these systems and give them a certain degree of sustainability with a view to inverting the erosion trend somewhat. That is a very evident theme in this intervention.

JN When we tried to establish a flow system along the River Lambro – which, in addition to being a circulation system in its own right, was also linked to the pedestrian and cycle path systems on the Milanese periphery – we likewise endeavoured to recuperate an ecological corridor that would allow for much greater fluidity in the movement of the fauna.

GB Another fascinating aspect of this work on the landscape is the introduction of the time factor. Architecture, in the classic tradition, works with inert materials, while landscaping works with materials that have specific organic life cycles. This introduces

variation, the changing of the seasons. In the case of Forlanini Park, it constitutes the very matter of the design project.

JN For the Milan reality, which is very urban and disconnected from natural and rural references, it was important to bring that dimension into everyday life. At the beginning there was an idea of flexibility of design: the proposal could not be closed or static, but should embrace a number of principles that later could be linked in different solutions. That should not be confused with formalism, but with a strategic sense, which would allow one to implement the park even with all the land ownership problems and the existence of private property within the park territory.

Furthermore, one approached the notion of time in different ways – through the materials used (live materials), through the way we envisaged the implementation of the park, which was meant to grow like an organism, and through theme gardens on the concept of time.

We had these spaces of reflection on time(s) – the theme gardens – in which we talked about the times for farming cultivations, the herbaceous plant cycles, their behaviours.

The topographical approach also led to the proposal of a park consisting of various strata, all of them visible but at different levels – the level on top of the dykes, the level of the natural land. The stratification discourse is always present in landscape – in Greek there are two expressions referring to land: "ge", which refers to the surface and "cton", which refers to the depth, a dark and subterranean world.

PARCO FOLANINI MILAN, ITALY

Designing landscape.

The project covers an area of approximately 320 hectares in the east of the city of Milan adjacent to Linate airport. It is part of a planned green belt that includes the neighbouring parks of Maserati and Monlué.

The park is a space of great complexity in terms of land use. It is crossed by major roads and includes disqualifying forms of land occupation that are typical of urban periphery situations as well as farming fields in cultivation.

The proposal defined a guiding strategy for the transformation of the site, aiming at creating a large green park while simultaneously solving land use problems, establishing the boundaries and the relationship with the city.

The structural proposal for the park is based on the clear demarcation of a large central open space and the creation of a peripheral strip, allowing the meandering course

The material of the landscape project inherently makes visible the relationship between those worlds because what is at the surface is merely the visible result of processes going on in the depths down below as well.

It is also important to state how Forlanini Park is fundamental for the city's own strategy in the coming years. This park is one of a series of interventions that seek to consecrate peripheral voids around Milan, turning them into green zones with a view to creating a kind of emerald necklace – like that in Boston – and making them a starting point for strong connections between the periphery, where one can still find certain signs of rural territory, and an utterly urban centre, in which, for the moment, it is still somewhat difficult to survive.

There is growing environmental degradation, fundamentally in terms of air quality, thanks to the intense pollution in Milan, obliging one to look at the city and the relations between it and live materials in a somewhat different manner.

GB Milan is, at present, one of the most scattered metropolitan areas in Italy, including both old compact towns and vast rural areas and stretching to Varesi. It is, indeed, a very interesting example, because Milan is also a city in which there is a high degree of mobility and pendularity between the historic nucleus, which still takes on an absorbing role, and the periphery. In this sense, the urban planning strategy underlying this type of park is fundamental, given that it responds to the urban strategy of creating linking and continuity elements.

What happens in these metropolitan cities is that, little by little, the “mineralisation” or crystallisation process gradually suffocates the green, which begins to form little pockets that then go into decline and end up almost disappearing. The green corridor systems are extremely important regenerative elements in achieving balance. In the case of Milan, Forlanini Park was one of seven or eight interventions that the City Council had meanwhile planned.

JN The strategy was to consecrate the large central space of the site, in which there were still visible signs of the agricultural past, as the grand central space, the park's great open space, consisting of grass areas and canals.

The structure of the green material and the earth material organises the whole edge of the park and emphasises, on the one hand, the interpretation of the central void and, on the other, establishes relations of permeability, re-establishing lost connections, through the peripheral fabric of the park itself. The connection between architecture and landscape design is interesting, precisely because these boundaries are not discussed, not sought out, not even felt. Because we don't try, for both corporative and disciplinary reasons, to mark them in an intense way, they emerge when they have to emerge and because they have to emerge. They are at the same time accomplices and fluid.

GB That is an aspect that is largely ignored in the teaching of the subjects, despite its pertinence at the academic level. Perhaps with the exception of the Anglo-Saxon countries,

where there continues to be a very strong traditional link between the architecture of the building, or even of the city, and the architectonic interpretation of the landscape.

In many countries, particularly in Europe, that link, which first arose in the 15th/16th centuries in Italy, France and England, has gradually been neglected, and has ended up disappearing from the curricula of most schools, thus creating a distance between the two activities, often even with antagonistic corporative interests. Curiously enough, that is not the case in Portugal, where the teaching was reinstated in the late 1930s, though as a part of botany and not architecture courses.

It is of extreme pertinence to try and understand to what extent these two realities come together, above all in the contemporary situation in which architecture clearly must abandon the discourse of the object and enter in the discourse of the relational space and the characterisation of the great territorial tensions, using hybrid space typologies. In the city of the periphery, the relationship between the full and the void is completely different to that in the historic centre and, consequently, the relative value of the so-called natural matter, which traditionally makes the concept of landscape, is becoming more and more a fundamental matter in defining these voids, which are gradually being humanised, becoming products of architecture.

If it is possible to speak of an evolution in terms of empty space models in the urban city, then the historic city is made up of channel spaces (the streets), in which the empty space connects with the sky and is contained by the limits that are the ground

and the façades of the buildings. Suddenly, these channels dilate and become rectangular or circular squares, a confinement or taming of the void that forms a certain space.

As we gradually move out of the historic centre, particularly in European cities subject to large extension or expansion, the sprawling suburbs, we begin to understand that the system of voids changes, reaching situations where it superimposes the delimitation of the built fabric and becomes the main protagonist. We call this the peripheral space, but it is part of the same city, the same urban reality.

The idea we have today of the public space is no longer the idea we used to characterise the use of the sidewalk, the street or the centre of the square, but has completely different, much more hybrid characteristics.

On the periphery we can hardly distinguish the country from the city. Even the proportion between the void and the full – or the building – is contrary to that of the historic centre. Today, one can even speak of the dispersion of voids. The question is that these spaces are more and more architectonic spaces, in the sense that, with or without a design project, they are modelled. Even if there is no architecture, there is a phenomenon of human intervention that gradually models these spaces.

Landscape designers have known that language – ever since the beginnings of garden design, from the Renaissance and Romantic gardens and the naturalist Anglo-Saxon parks of the 19th century. They know that this void, as a relational system, is one of the strongest architectonic acts.

Opening a glade in a forest, defining a square, circular or elongated glade are gestures, are architectonic attitudes that proceed from a concept, an idea – architecture is always based on an idea, that is why it is artificial, human – except that one is modelling and working material that is not traditional architectural material, which is fundamentally more inert, more mineral – even the materials of contemporary architecture, the architecture of transparency, of luminosity, of glass, of high-tech light structure systems, of carbon fibres, etc.

From the point of view of operability of the concept, it is not very different from the architect's perspective.

There is a disciplinary convergence that is very important, even though the two disciplines work with completely different materials. The other important aspect, and one that transpires in most of the projects exhibited at the Biennale – especially in the large-scale projects such as Fátima and Forlanini Park – is how these projects work the idea of the void on a large scale.

They introduce into the manner of defining the large void space excavated areas or raised pieces of land following an identical form.

In the case of Fátima, a curved shape that seeks to enhance and raise the great void of the sanctuary, which is a large-scale space – 500 metres by 200 metres in size and work a programme – a church with approximately 1 hectare of surface area – which, in any other way, would destroy the void, the space of celebration and convergence for the pilgrims. The architectural programme is worked to a topographic, geographic scale,

in which the enormous void is valued as an element of identity and convergence of all the movement of the pilgrims.

In the case of Forlanini Park, the void is used as a system of transition between the canonic city and the periphery: an excavation below the railway boundary, which is a belt that severs the contact between the city of the blocks and the void of the former farms, the old industrial sites, which themselves are already half abandoned and the large infrastructures such as the motorway viaduct network.

This great void is a negative response to the dimension of two blocks in particular from the 19th century or end of the 19th century, which, with an upward and downward movement, overcomes the railway belt, passing underneath, introducing units of reference, paths, a strategy of peripheral accesses and car parks, gradually highlighting not only this other more fragmentary reality, but a scene design, the presence of the infrastructures themselves, which become elements of the landscape itself. That is also a recurrent theme in the design for the Province of Flemish Brabant House in Leuven.

The railway connections and the trains are part of the landscape of the metropolitan city. They are artificial elements, as are the viaducts and their movements, introducing very interesting facets with dimensions that did not exist in the historic city.

JN The boundary between disciplines relates to cultural questions and even prejudice. If we go back in time and think of the rural

of the River Lambro to indicate the connection routes to the neighbouring parks.

The definition of the peripheral strip as a potent volumetric fabric will integrate existing constructions and land uses, and new buildings serving new functions are also proposed.

The fundamental piece in constituting this identity and for the landscaping unity of the area, results from the interpretation of a common element in the rural landscape of Lombardy, the argine, a long mole built for flood control and field drainage purposes.

PROVINCE OF THE FLEMISH BRABANT HOUSE LEUVEN, BELGIUM

Prolonging urban life in the work space.

A new centrality was planned for along the railway channel platform of adjacent to the historic centre of Leuven, in which the House of the Province of Flemish Brabant building is a reference element.

territory in Roman times, the way they constructed the country was profoundly architectonic.

In addition to the construction of the place, there is a form of construction that is spatialised and, consequently, abstract; a clearly architectonic way of marking, of artificialising, spatialising, of transforming a place into a space - a reality more related with its representation than with its essence itself, its functioning.

That is a reality, which, in Italian culture in particular, was part of everyday life until prejudices brought about by the affirmation of bourgeois culture emerged, which completely destroyed the interpretations and the possibilities of decodification of the urban, of all the rural codes and all the natural codes, which had everything to do with the functioning of the city until this enormous abyss took shape.

Conversation with Nuno Portas

Architect since 1959.

Born in Vila Viçosa in 1934. Chair in Urban Planning at the University of Oporto's School of Architecture. Leading partner in architecture firm Nuno Teotónio Pereira/Nuno Portas Arquitectos, where Gonçalo Byrne began his professional career.

GB I know you are well acquainted with Marcel Smets's urban project for Leuven in Belgium, which I think is a highly interesting study in the re-use of a railway channel. We later participated in the competition for the Province of Flemish Brabant House. The project seeks to make use of the railway infrastructure and the connections with the territory, which, in this case, is a large metropolitan area in a territory of high mobility.

NP That seems to me an interesting place to start a conversation on your projects. I think that the Leuven project is a concentration of the method that has characterised your work for many years now. Compared to that of other architects it is almost a counter-method. Once could sum it up in one sentence: "You arrive at the form, while others depart from the form". As the project advances, new information is integrated, which, in turn, changes during the conception process, injecting inputs that contribute to the final form.

These projects create opportunities; they are located mostly in hybrid areas between the "canonical" historic and compact city and the more fragment or yet-to-be-made part - marked, for example, by railway systems or by products of the industrial city that are being replaced, renewed, modernised. Leuven is an exemplary case.

Recently you have had a lot of projects in already structured or built spaces, as stable references.

GB Curiously enough - in the Aveiro University campus - a plan you developed...

NP It is in those areas of urban connection that a lot of the future of the medium-sized and large cities is decided. In the outskirts, all questions - be they programmatic, topographic, etc. - originate projects of variable and phased geometries, and there is always an infrastructure or a landscaping vision that links them. It's different to the times when you worked in Olivais or in Chelas and each part was a kind of island.

The contemporary city is a hyper-fragmented one: it was born and gradually formed for the most diverse reasons and it currently has a hunger that it doesn't know how to satisfy. Experiments on the intermediate scale are being carried out, of which the Leuven building is an example. But each intervention has to be exemplary - we have to find forms that are reproducible.

GB I agree that today architects are facing great challenges, given that the problems in the modern city are emerging with progressive degrees of complexity and dependence.

NP Passing on testimony is a condition. That comes across very well in the Leuven project. At a certain point, the question became one of how to do the higher, more linear part because the "plot" follows the railway line. An idea of volumes, which could be considered neo-rationalist or neo-functional, has in this case all the *raison d'être* possible: it configures patios/enclosures between the blocks while maintaining a serial language.

The main façade of the tower fixes the point where the Boulevard Circular meets the railway channel at the top of Justus Lipsius Street.

In front of the tower a square, a reflex of the elevation, is the connection to the city's public space. The square and the great suspended blade, facing the railway line, respond to the peculiar circumstances of the place.

The ground floor of the building, seven metres above the railway channel, goes from the square through to the garden.

Patios opening up to the railway line alternate with the building's interior on this level.

The final result was much more revealing: the rigidity of the model is fully contradicted when one visits the building and passes through the "cloister galleries" that constitute the various links. We tried to do that in Aveiro and you ended up doing it in the Vice-chancellor's office building.

In Leuven, the "standard" volumes were recuperated so as to not create a barrier along the railway line, which would be absurd from the noise protection point of view. That solution is revealing of the method according to which, as you study the problem, the form gradually imposes itself. It is a value in this moment because, when you arrive at the form, you already have a lot of information reduced to certainty.

GB There is a curious aspect when you speak of the "form as the arrival point and not as the departure point". In the project for the Instituto Superior de Economia e Gestão in Lisbon, a certain fragmentation of the volume was proposed because the protagonist was the public space.

NP But you have another project that is somewhat antagonistic to it, the tower...

GB I don't think it's all that antagonistic; it structures extensive spaces which, in a certain form, are infinite or of a variable dimension. It is what Le Corbusier meant by the phrase "rendre la forme". That protagonism of the public space means, in this case, marking out a final path.

Like topographic stabilizers, the patios intercalate between the various functional bodies of the building, connecting the programmatic areas with the exterior and giving them breathing space.

The line between public space and private space, which is intentionally fine, uses transparency and opacity as the basis for mutation in an interactive space, which reacts to the surrounding cityscape and the sky and the passing trains in successive exteriors and interiors.

The building was imagined as a dosing device that joins, in a cinematographic way, the interiors and exteriors and the public and private space, allowing the context itself to occupy it.

NP You were already on that path in your proposal for the Belém Arts Centre, in which one of the street axes led straight to the Tower of Belém.

GB That is well possible...

NP The same method emerges now in another point and the tower rises like a finishing to something that could no longer continue there, because the water comes immediately after it! Finding an adequate programme for making a tower that was not gratuitous - in relation to the city - would mean that it would have to have its own symbolic value. That emblematic value was found in the inclination, which is not a common form in your designs.

It seems to me that this emphasis on the public space is the key to the question and that these monuments figure as signs of the public space, as has always been the case in history. This emphasis is the resource for prolonging an idea beyond the programme. Basically it is coming back to the lesson of the historic city, when, for example, the Romans laid out their *Cardus* and *Decumanus* streets or the hipodamic grids that gradually characterised the founded cities. Our periphery is, in a certain way, a project for the re-foundation of things that are born as fragments and the public space was always the support for the urban discourse. I have insisted a lot on the idea that the public space is more permanent than the buildings, which have much shorter functional lives.

For a long time, the public space was also an artistic, symbolic object. But it

was always a conscious form of guaranteeing the evolution of the city. In a letter to the governors of Brazil, for example, King Manuel I, warned: "Take care not to allow houses to be built that obstruct the continuation of the streets". The kings of Spain were saying at the same time: "Make a central square, from which streets shall run that must not be interrupted".

The heavier infrastructures are, probably, those that will persist longer in time - such as massive transport systems like the metro or high speed trains - while those that flourish on top and pay for what is underneath, may vary as time goes on.

In some cases, they are systems conceived for a long duration, such as, for example, shopping centres or logistical structures. In other cases, they are designed for permanence, like monuments.

The public space begins in the infrastructures one cannot see - which are indeed "infra" in the true sense of the term, as they are below the conventional ground level. Then it spreads into the external public spaces.

In our first projects [in the 60s], the public space was already important to us, but it was conceived of as being inside an island, defined by the cell of the social housing neighbourhoods - they were called cells, which is was indeed significant - and now, the Detail Plans (DPs) can have that perverse effect. I always argue that the DPs should have variable geometries.

Your projects are conceived to be able to have that metabolism.

GB That then works on its own. It is designed by time...

NP Do you remember when we called the architectural and urban planning fictions of the late 1960s “metabolist” projects? This continues to be a very important perspective, because a lot of those programmes, or those metabolisms, take place during the short period of the design project itself. The design begins with one programme and finishes with another. In the management of the project itself one learns with the design: one sees that a certain anchor is not effective, and one looks for another one. One has to play with things; on the periphery, each intervention results in a little more independence from what surrounds it. For that reason there are immense empty spaces or “espacements” as [Françoise] Choay would say. The problem of the periphery is not high density, for, if one were to measure the gross densities, the periphery has an extremely low density.

GB I believe that the idea of the design project learning as it goes along places the emphasis on the question of considering the design not only on the basis of the final product – which today is bound up with a mediated final image – but also on the process of maturation of the form...

NP There is a trend in architecture towards urban planning: the latter, in turn, is increasingly re-incorporating architecture, after having distanced itself from it at the

outset. This hybridism allows one to be in a terrain of increasing, and indeed desirable, confluence.

GB That is a central and extremely important question. In Leuven, one has that connection with the Smets plan: it is a process that makes the so-called intermediate-scale – and transitional – urban project where, obviously, all these aspects blend together and work. One understands the limits between the urban planning component and the architectural component.

NP There is a third important aspect that is part of the public space system: the green component, the ecological or organic part of the city. From the point of view of method, it constitutes more and more a layer similar to that of the infrastructure. It is also an environmental support that later legitimates the fixation and organisation of the human activities in the territory.

Obviously, these two layers are not always parallel or coinciding – they have their own separate, though interlinked, logics. In cities of the first industrial wave, such as Barcelona or Paris, the system of boulevards seemed to solve that two-fold problem. At present, an ecological structure is defined – the Portuguese master development plans are obliged to do that – that is no longer a non edificandi reserve, but its own functional system. This does not mean that the transport infrastructures – the great infrastructures of human interaction – coincide with that ecological structure. Part of the green structure and system gains relative autonomy.

Between these two infrastructure levels – the hard, mineral infrastructure and the vegetal, living, organic superstructure – the urban “condensators” and the physical “containers” of the activities “fit in”.

This is how I see intervention in the extended or extensive city: making the historic city more open and making the periphery more continuous, because it has been fragmented too much.

GB Today there is still the very dominant notion of finding balances for that sustainability.

NP Sustainability is not a solution; it is a result. For reasons that are complementary to each other, both low and high density are sustainable. There is much research to be done. And there is a lot of demagoguery too... Sustainability is an ill-defined value. One doesn't really know if it is merely the biophysical, from which the idea was born; or if it is already such an integral concept that it involves a political process and the whole implementation, the problem of social cohesion and, above all, the happiness of men. I think that this idea of sustainability [has infiltrated] your architectural production in the last thirty years!

GB A large part of this issue is, indeed, not being invented now. They are ideas that are between twenty and thirty years old!

NP Curiously enough, we worked together at the time, though for a very short period...

This double habitability between the ground and the skies and between natural limits and built boundaries celebrates the protagonism of the interrelated spaces – of a system of voids that feed off and simultaneously nourish the surrounding city.

GB Yes, in the early 70's...

NP In the [late] 60s there were two projects in gestation, at the [Nuno Teotónio Pereira's] architecture firm that practically coincided. One was the Restelo plan, for which I was responsible and where we clearly began with the streets – which are there and I think it would be difficult to change them.

The other one, which was later nicknamed the “Pink Panther” and was your [Byrne/AntónioReis Cabrita] responsibility: a super-building that contained the public space within itself. The building formalised a large square that had been neglected for many years – a fatal aspect for its social use in the start-up phase.

They were two systems developed to respond to very similar problems: one was the public space system that sought to be independent of the buildings (indeed, we did not even know what the buildings were going to look like, we could only define rules); the other one, yours, sought to incorporate a part of the public space into the building itself.

There were a lot of projects at the time that defended this idea. All of them were the product of the latest wave of rationalism, a little brutalist in general, and the sought to transfer the concept of the city to the high-rise building. I think that was the end of an era and not the beginning of a new one. Today we are using the Restelo system more because uncertainty has increased and continuity is more readily accepted.

In the SAAL project [Casal Figueiras, Setúbal], a more open approach was possible. When you did the SAAL project in the

mid-70's, the most decisive contribution was considering the global vision of the landscape as public space. Your intervention gives consistency to the deformed surrounding landscape.

GB Do you not think that, in a certain way, that line of thought is also reflected somewhat in the proposal presented for the Belém Arts Centre, which is very antagonistic to Gregotti's beautiful proposal?

NP They are antagonistic and, curiously enough, very similar. When one looks down from above, both have quadricules and the difference is that your public space system allowed for independence of the parts.

GB It is the same discussion that had come from the 1970's.

NP Your proposal ended up being passed over because, if we look at the way things were, the client did not want it to be evolutive. The political client wanted it to be defined. The last project that was similar to the winning one [Gregotti/Manuel Salgado] was the project for the Baixa Pombalina district in Lisbon.

At a certain point, I had to justify my vote by saying that we were choosing between the Manuel da Maia of the Baixa Pombalina and the Ressano Garcia of the Avenidas Novas. We were trying to think how could we make the city through the design of the public space and not through the buildings or the pre-design of the buildings, when in the Baixa Pombalina

it is impossible to separate the two things. Indeed, you wrote an excellent article on the Baixa that shows precisely that an integral project is one thing and that a project of parts is another altogether. Not parts that are added to each other, but layers, which, in turn, are built taking into account inter-related information. It is a response to the apparent saturation of the “holistic” or “totality” concept, which can have a paralysing effect, if we are aware that, in order to decide one thing, we have to know all the others.

GB You have quite an in-depth knowledge of other realities, namely the Brazilian situation, through your cooperation in projects in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Santo André... Some of the works may not have been realised, but the projects were conceived and designed.

NP The concept of public space is quite universal. If one thinks of Brazilian architecture, it has its original aspects but is sustained on the European paradigms: the paradigms tend to be more universal, whereas the specific forms can be adapt to cultures. It may be true that the dimensions of the public space we speak of today are not really similar to those of the historic European city; though there are constancies in many an historic city of the European model in Latin America, Asia, the United States, North America and they are naturally different, for example, to Arabic conurbations of Muslim origins, or others that emerge in Africa.

LARGE COVERED ASSEMBLY SPACE FÁTIMA, PORTUGAL

On the full void or the discovery of the ascension.

The intention was the maximum compaction of a volume that would nevertheless not go unnoticed, raising up to the highest possible level without questioning the essential option for an overlookable roof.

This option, which ritualizes the approach to the Sanctuary and the presence of the cross of the Chapel of the Apparitions,

The same paradigm, the same type and the same prototypes can coexist, but they are spelt in different ways. Global culture makes these crosses possible.

Even in Europe, the public space that is being created on the periphery – with the exception of some very academic solutions such as those of the Krier brothers – is no longer the same as that of the historic city. [Bernardo] Sechi explains why.

What has animated the concept of public space move today is the great revolution in the concept of space-time. The city is no longer measured only in terms of space, but also in terms of time.

The question of the green, the organic, the new landscape is something we still have to discover: how do we integrate it? How does it affect the public space and to what extent does it free itself from it? Although ecology and landscape are aspects that are dealt with by professionals with distinct types of training – one more artistic, the other more botanic – I believe that they will come a lot closer.

GB But either of them is quite architectural in the sense that they manipulate something artificial or artificially manipulate a concept of nature.

NP The landscaping culture is can be more easily associated with the more mineral architectural culture, as indeed it has been in other periods, from Le Nôtre to Olmsted. In my interpretation of the city – of certain crucial points, certain very accentuated elements – the green substitute the great

stone monument of times gone by or the great closed element.

GB I believe it is a central question in the discussion of architecture as a discipline, and I insist on it in a somewhat empirical way. The relationship between space and time, which has changed so much and so quickly recently, is a topic that is dealt with very little at the education level.

NP What I imagined would be educational for architects at the time the SAAL project was launched, after the Portuguese revolution of 1974, was, on the one hand, that the participation of the inhabitants was clear and, on the other, that the people continued to live in the same places. But it was also bringing architects to think of solutions that later could be generally applied beyond the scope of SAAL and were evolutive in the sense of the open work.

Umberto Eco's "The Open Work" was a book that influenced us a lot, even though it preceded the Revolution, if I'm not mistaken.

We took the concept of the open work literally: "I don't know what this design project will be like at the end of the process". But the evolutive house, for example, in the Bauhaus logic, proceeded from the final house, from which, later, parts were taken away like Lego bricks, to be added later.

This open ending of the open work, which was already a concern in the 70's, contained the logic that I later developed in urban planning. Unfortunately, the greater part of the SAAL projects did not work that way.

We lost the value that was "designing for appropriateness" as opposed to the "designing to teach people how to live" approach inherent in the rationalist paradigm, imposing at times models that were half a century old.

It would be interesting if our students of today went back to those pilot worksites [SAAL] and saw what was changed. Could it be that the people ended up transforming the closed works into open works?

Conversation with Álvaro Siza

Architect since 1955.

Born in Matosinhos in 1933. Pritzker Prize-winner in 1992. Has taught at the University of Oporto's School of Architecture. Siza and Gonçalo Byrne were part of the SAAL Brigades after the 1974 Revolution and were responsible for two of the most emblematic works of the period: São Victor (Siza, Oporto) and Casal Figueiras (Byrne, Setúbal).

GB I was going to ask you to speak a bit on the relationship with landscape. We have talked before about the Forlanini Park in Milan, a project to create a huge park of some

350 hectares. It was a competition we won a few years back, together with the landscape designer João Nunes. One of the interesting aspects is that the plots of land begin with a railway belt. Milan expands afterwards in blocks delimited by that belt which, in this case, is the branch line to the Venice line.

That line is a wall built seven metres above the ground. It separates the central domain from that of the urban periphery, with the considerable help of the tangential strip of the motorways, with their "spaghetti" junctions. There are junctions and flyovers crossing over parts of the park and, at the end, one of the Linate Airport runways. The plot of land transiting gradually from the compact city to the fragmented city covers an area of approximately 3,5 km by 1 km. It includes the remains of old farms, a river – which today is nothing more than a drain – and a series of industrial sites in varying degrees of abandonment.

The design fundamentally proposes an excavation under the railway line, on an inclined plane, which emerges on the other side, thus establishing links to the city and integrating the fragments of the farms and factories. It is born, therefore, out of an idea of urban graduation, transition...

AS Excavated...

GB Precisely, excavated, creating underneath the railway channel a space with the breadth of two blocks that opens up onto the park like an urban continuity device. Of course, the landscaping component then comes into play. But the interesting theme is that

of the passage from the compact city to the periphery – which, in Milan, is a disaster – and the re-contextualisation of the existing large infrastructures, which have been part of the scenario for a long time.

AS The idea I have is that the territory is well organised.

GB It is an order that was gradually altered. You build a little here and a little there, resulting in this dispersion, and the old farms are no longer operating.

The project has been halted. The city council does not have the funds to invest and they are currently thinking of dividing the project into segments and establishing public/private sector agreements.

AS You have other projects in Italy at the moment.

GB We are going to build an apartment tower in Jesolo, a beach resort with a large pine wood behind it, on the coast between Venice and Caorle. It follows a very interesting plan developed by Galfetti.

I also have a small project in Vicenza, as indeed you do. A secondary school with a gymnasium in the historic centre. We won a competition.

AS And have you had your first conflicts with Vicenza?

GB Yes, it went quite well, although I did have to alter the design. I had to put it underground, because you can't make

so-called "modern" or "contemporary" architecture in the historic centre of Vicenza. A gymnasium is, as a rule, a monolithic, cubic volume: you cannot do cubes there, so you cannot do gymnasiums. The solution of the city council was to put it underground, which was by no means incorrect.

AS Not in those circumstances, no. But it is dramatic when you have to bury architecture, conceal it.

GB They base themselves on a historicism that is completely out of proportion.

AS There might be another experience in store for you – when the archaeologists enter the field and start finding remains.

GB In Italy, digging means discovering. Not to mention the ecologists...

It is increasingly not so much a political question but an inter-party game of interests and even the political perspective is lost somewhere along the line. If there was a political perspective, the city would come first. Unfortunately, the first objective is never that of the city.

AS It is to conquer power and defend the interests that power clings to.

GB There's also a lack of perception that to do certain things [in the city] you have to work with a more expanded concept of time. If you are continuously negating what was done before, the city does not benefit, the guiding idea is lost.

avoided breaking the dimension that currently exists between the Paul VI Centre and the Basilica in terms of visual continuity and scale and the processional, on a site for which the reference is always the framing of the heavenly vault.

The presence of the GECA, which is immense in its relationship with the forecourt, reflects the almost pictorial relationship of three highly symbolic elements in the ecclesiastic architectural tradition: the staircase, the tower and the cross.

The union of the three elements expose the breadth of the enormous nave of the building and likewise the presence of the Sanctuary, which the pilgrims discover gradually on their final efforts to climb the stairs.

The approach from the east, from the Chapel of the Apparitions, is immediately captured by the large descending door, which contradicts the large ascending volume and reveals the succession of the atriums of the secondary chapels and the Chapel of Reconciliation and the great transversal atrium, whose vault extends like a gigantic sky, accompanying the surroundings of the presbytery.

The invisibility of the proposed building is opposed by a dynamic, processional visibility, mirroring the successive revelations of its course, embodying the axiom of concealing to reveal, even daring to simulate, in a profound and silent form, the extraordinary manifestation of the Sacred, of the calling of the faithful to the pilgrimage.

AS That is precisely the problem. If each administration, each term of office, is for four years, what is the goal? Four years for them to show what they are worth. Clearly that is not enough. Everything is done under enormous pressure and, in many cases, without a programmatic structure. In short, you have to everything ready before the four-year term. That is the beginning...

GB The perspective of the city is lost completely.

AS We work under constant pressure, particularly if the commission is a public one. But at least we have democracy. Also there can be no doubt that these things have an inherent perversity.

Even so, there are different situations: in the Netherlands, for example, you don't sense that need to negate everything that was done by the previous administration. Halfway through the project for The Hague, there was a change of administration and the work in progress continued. There was no need to completely destroy what had already been done; some things were suspended or modified, while other things continued as they were.

GB The Netherlands, like other Central European countries, have a very long democratic tradition.

AS They are more developed democracies and, consequently, they master more completely not only territorial and landscape

development but also development of the city itself. There is also a need for great discipline, for irrepensible planning.

We are talking about a country that has had a National Plan since 1902. They have an organisational and planning heritage. Just now we were talking about Portugal: in our culture we have a dread of the empty space and that is reflected in our landscape. You can see it from an airplane. You cross the border and when you enter Portuguese territory you begin to see "little things", "little things"... The borderline is there, indeed.

GB That fear of the void is destroying the public space. I don't know if it's a Portuguese phenomenon only, but [here] that fear of the empty space is particularly tangible. Add to that the fact that we lack sensitivity in relation to the quality of the public space... I think these aspects are very closely linked.

What you said about the aerial view of the landscape is interesting, above all because I remember seeing in your sketches the way you began many of [your early] projects. I have always said that your architecture is born out of landscape-based reading and interpretation. One always senses in it a desire to establish a gradual relationship with the landscape as a place, be it open or urban.

That reflects the notion of architecture as always having that dimension of constructing landscape. When you make an intervention in a place you are always transforming what is in that place; from that point of view, it is not so much the context that will make

a design, but the design that will intervene in the context, measure up with it and, consequently, create a transformed landscape.

AS It may even transform it very violently, as a natural starting point for the development of a design. Or the transformation may be slight, gradual and continuous. It depends on what the project is; it depends on what it means in the city or, if it is not in a city, in the city's surroundings.

Nasoni's Bishop's Palace in Oporto [is] a huge amalgamation superimposed upon the houses of the city and no one says that it destroys the city because it is very authentic in terms of the intensity of the transformation it meant.

But now, when we are talking about making another "little house" of the kind that transforms the "little house" into a monument – then these dichotomic discussions on modest architecture/affirmative architecture emerge.

One of the things that often happen is the need for a presence, a visibility that is not taken into account by what the city needs.

GB I would like to talk about the [Cais do Carvão] project in Funchal.

It was designed to show all the violent force of the lava, which, when it met the sea and suddenly cooled down, formed a kind of small cliff approximately 15 metres in height: black stone, a series of terraces for banana cultivation, with little walls that still exist.

There was also a ruin with two walls in the same dark stone. It was an abandoned coal store, gutted, with no roof.

The project proposed new volumes. A cube using the two black walls of the ruin to create the volume of the aquarium; the other one, a clearly vertical and counterpoised building that functions as a kind of gauge, measuring the height of the cliff. I believe that this dimension is, in architecture, very transforming.

Obviously, it would always have to relate to the topography, to the location; to the location in its dimension and natural processes. It also has to confront it, challenge it with a scale it can measure up against. That dimension, the dimension of architecture as a landscaping component, is one of the most important ones.

It is something I have always seen and see in your designs.

AS One very interesting aspect of your design for Madeira is that the built volumes emerged with great rigour. Architecture, has to distinguish itself from nature. But, in one form or another, it emerges from nature, is part of a whole, no matter how much it distinguishes itself.

GB Everything changes to remain the same.

I'm thinking of that project of yours that was not built – the restaurant at Pico do Areeiro in Madeira... It is another project that, although it appeared to intervene very little, ends up being an intensive intervention because it builds a kind of bridge between the two peaks.

AS The solution is the harmonisation with the hiking path.

GB That gesture, so simple looking, introduces new information that profoundly transforms the context. It transforms it, adding a value that was not there before and that is the value that persists.

AS It maintained the void that is that platform, from which the path up the mountain went on.

The process of active consideration of the landscape, access routes, is an indispensable support. I think it is lack of imagination... I don't consider myself to be imaginative at all, but I also think that we have a very romantic idea of what it means to have imagination or to be imaginative.

I notice that I have a huge problem in finding my bearings in a city I don't live in. I can go to a city ten times and I still don't know my way around on my tenth visit.

When I am working on a project, I am forced to study everything closely, otherwise I will be disorientated

At the same time, I am obliged to use very complete resources – photographs, repeated visits to the sites, models – to begin to understand the logics of a work. I believe that is an exercise that is indispensable for architecture to be able to understand a whole range of connections. Although [it] ends up being able to express itself as an "object".

But it is always an object placed in a relationship with the city, in a continuum, a fabric. And it can create links to other "objects".

GB What you notice most when you fly over a city are the empty spaces, the streets, the plots of land... It is the systems of spaces between the objects that construct the

time-related landscapes. These sedimented landscapes make it possible to recognise the city: what is older and what is not so old.

Time leaves its imprint.

AS Time also selects... I notice a lot of the anxiety in defining new environments.

The idea that modern cities are ugly. It is a generalised idea, isn't it?

Brasilia, for example, was subject to the most ferocious criticism for a wide range of reasons. It went through that phase because a city, in order to consolidate and gain its own life, needs time.

I remember seeing an old engraving of the foundation of Buenos Aires and it was so disheartening... A horrible new city that was transformed in time into a magnificent city, perfect in its relations across an enormous territory.

A thing that has just been made is always something that lacks a lot; it lacks times, the superimpositions, the interventions.

What we do when we design a city is, basically, is to create a system that is open to possible superimpositions and, to a certain extent, the selective orientation of those superimpositions.

When I finish a project, I almost always have a sensation of a model, of something unfinished, something a little inadequate. The Chiado district, for example. You are still working in the Chiado, aren't you?

GB That's halted too. But that's another story.

AS When the Chiado project ended, I felt a certain disappointment. But it was a somewhat

CAIS DO CARVÃO COMPLEX – AQUARIUM AND MARINE BIOLOGY STATION FUNCHAL, MADEIRA, PORTUGAL

The revealing, tranquilizing effect of the rocks

The structuring principles for the complex seek harmony with the location and affirmation in relation to the sea, prolonging the logic of the terrace onto the gently inclined land that forms the rocky slope.

The design project incorporates part of the pre-existing elements and contains, essentially, three new interventions in the form of a wall, a platform and two constructed volumes.

The wall parallel to the coast is vaguely curved, incorporating, at the higher level, the belvedere that is the both arrival point and entrance to the complex.

The platform, which is natural and at a lower level, frames of the ocean below and the sinuous rock face above and serves to distribute the access routes.

The two built volumes are at a lower level, supported on land – on the cliff and the quay.

On the eastern side is the Research Centre; on the western side are exterior tanks let into the sea via a ramp.

different disappointment, because in the midst of all that richness that time and men have gradually created – Lisbon's Baixa district – it is evident that a work that has just been completed is either open to the new things that are being done or has the degree of finishing necessary and is not apt for ageing well.

My immediate disappointment was, therefore, not rational. If I think about it, it was more a reaction of the kind: "that's just the way it will have to be".

GB There is a beautiful text by [Rafael] Moneo in which he says that it is essential for buildings, once they are finished, that they are fixed in time, in their immense solitude, as solitary objects that gain their own life. That article has always impressed me a lot. It says in other words what you yourself were saying, because, deep down, architecture generates the city forms and structures that are open to transformation by time. They are spaces that are fundamentally prepared to contain life.

There is a notion of life that is always subjacent to cities, that comes from way back and will continue to exist, creating the idea that architecture is part of the process that intervenes in life. But life also intervenes in the buildings, doesn't it?

AS Today the conditioning factors are much more easily overcome. In the architecture of the past, the restrictions were so strong that it was almost impossible to free oneself from the organicity of all that was being done. That is not the case today. You have machines that can do everything and only a great exercise in discipline – I would almost say humility

– could maintain that relationship and that organicity on a different scale.

If it is possible to get to a mountain, what is topography anyway?

We could say that it is a thing of the past and that it doesn't make sense. But I still believe that it does make sense for many reasons and one of them is that you don't lose the tracks in the territory, the indications, that orientation.

GB We both were involved in the SAAL projects. The questions raised then were very important. The idea was to get the people to participate, which is a very complex matter and one that is open to a lot of manipulation.

AS Normally, when we do collective housing, there is no fertile ground for debate. [In the SAAL projects, participation] was a demand of the people. I found that experience interesting as an extraordinary work condition, although I also had many problems and hindrances. But that is always the case, and it was very enriching work. All that freedom of action and lack of inhibition reflected a very special political situation and, to a certain extent, a void in power or in the definition of power.

As examples of optimal work conditions I later had my experiences in The Netherlands and Germany, where everything was much more organised. There was none of that spontaneity of the conflict taken to the extreme. It was much more controlled, and it functioned extremely well.

In the Dutch case, there was a context of a very conflict-rich neighbourhood.

It was a concentration point for immigrants with very well organised conditions, social workers, social workers for Islamic immigrants, translation at the meetings, etc... That enabled me to do the project the way it is, thanks to the support that came through the debate, the conflict, the ambiguity.

When I opted for a solution, it met with a certain amount of repulsion on the part of the specialists and was only approved thanks to the support of the various populations – populations coming from India, Indonesia, Surinam and even Portugal. They were so varied that the approval went the whole way to the municipal parliament.

They were working conditions of great authenticity and great transparency.

[Meanwhile] participation has been subject to a great deal of discredit. The star culture we have in architecture today is also not very favourable. It is not an attractive process. It is very difficult and slow and, because of that, participated architect has been stigmatised as "bad architecture".

I wouldn't say it has died. There is always an appetite for it, if not to say a need. But it really is not very high profile at the moment.

I doubt that the work you did in Setúbal [Casal Figueiras] would have been possible outside that specific period and context. The option in relation to the landscape is very special, very intense.

GB I would like to introduce a new note: the strong repression the authorities exercised in an attempt to concentrate the residents in high-rise buildings to be built on the slope, which didn't make sense at all.

What makes the story interesting is that it was the residents themselves who said: "we're not even going to discuss that!". They organised several demonstrations. They clearly had an idea of the type of house they wanted – a house next to ground level, with a patio – and that was part of their claims.

AS Of course, there were a lot of things... A great variety of reactions. It is also true that it was parts of the populations themselves who wanted the towers, arguing that "if the bourgeois live in towers, then we want to too. Because if it's good for them, it must be better".

GB [Approaching] the question of the public space: Europe has always cultivated a certain resistance in relation to its public space. In China, as in other countries, it is a much more fluid, open question... I remember the comments of [Vittorio] Gregotti, that the notion of the public space as a [cultural landscape] is very characteristic of European cultures. I wonder if that notion is not in a crisis now.

AS As a concern, an affirmation – be it literary or not – it is very present. That idea of the public space was created, and despite the theoretical work of some architects and journalists, the public space is seen as the basis that resolves everything else... But it clearly doesn't. The relationship between the free space and the volumes present is what is important.

In Europe there is a history of great density and great fragmentation, and that has to do with the occupation of the territory,

wars, political developments, mentalities, etc. Italy, for example, is, or was, made up of city states, blocks that were closed in relation to the landscape – just as you spoke at the beginning in relation to the periphery of Milan with its large factories.

The treatment of the city is almost like that of a large house. The public space is public but, just like in a house, there is a notion of a continuum.

An historian would be able to explain the medieval scenario better, in which there were feudal lords, owners of the land, and the power lay in the articulation between the geographic fragmentation and the very compact units, which, in many cases, were very independent.

In Japan, on the other hand...

The Japanese city is like a great labyrinth. Europe is, in this aspect, very peculiar. But it has also exported its concept to other countries: to America in general and also to the Orient and to the colonies... And it continues to have that historic importance, which is, indeed, very present.

The Naval Club, in turn, opens up to the sea, offering bathing activities and light water sports.

The former «Quinta da Calaça» house was renovated, maintaining its current function as the doorway to the Naval Club.

Two emerging vertical elements: a slim tower lift providing direct access to the street and, on the other side of the house, a compact volume leaning onto the slope, its narrow glass façade facing the sea and its longer side the rocks, establishing the limit of the intervention.