SOUTHERN ARCHITECTURES

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Abstract

Our task is to analyze the Southern modernisms, which we have so far studied in relation to housing, from a wider architectural point of view. More precisely, we intend to discuss the architectural culture of Southern Europe, both in its local specificities, as well as its relationship with international architecture. We are also interested in understanding the degree of intentionality and the theoretical conscience of each of these manifestations.

Keywords: Southern architecture, critical regionalism, international regionalism, transition-space

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This project explore the possibility of revising the dominant definition of *modernism,* based on the following hypothesis: the modernisms of Southern Europe have affirmed themselves and established their roots in popular culture (in vernacular art and architecture), anticipating, to a large extent, the movement that would be later coined as *critical regionalism* (Lefaivre and Tzonis, Frampton). Indeed, we have considered the hypothesis of the existence of regionalism from a very early date and that would establish itself as a form of resistance to the hegemony of international styles and to gain "critical" consistency.

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Departing from these premises, and focusing our attention on the first three decades of the 20th century, we have attempted to understand the architectural culture of Southern Europe, more precisely, of Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece. Accordingly, we argue that it is, firstly, important to clarify that, in our approach; we will use contemporary critical tools, such as the notions of *critical regionalism* and *critical internationalism*, whose formulation was carried out in the aftermath of the epoch in study. The concept of *critical regionalism* was formulated by Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis in 1981, and it was reformulated by Kenneth Frampton two years later. Ever since, this concept has been widely used, as a theoretical and critical tool, in order to study the architectural trends that developed during the second half of the 20th century.

The same concept is characterized by the enhancement and the reconversion of local architectural traditions by contemporary production. This process reflects an aspect of resistance to hegemonic tendencies of different nature, that is to say, cultural, political or economic trends. Obviously, similarly to all other regionalisms, it has a strong **identitarian** component and is, in this particular case, a clear reaction to cultural universalisation.

As summarized by Pedro Vieira de Almeida (2005: 71), "with due care – the same care that Frampton also used, when he avoided deliberately sentimental, populist and vernacularly demagogic interpretations -, we may declare, even if in an approximate way, that the *critical regionalism* intends to promote local values to the level of an international language." However, the notion of *critical regionalism* may be somewhat rigid, as it implies the understanding of local values as a pre-defined, static reality that can be later appropriated by others.

Vieira de Almeida draws our attention to the insufficiency of this perspective, and suggests, instead, the notion of the *critical internationalism* as an indispensable complementary tool, in order to understand a reality he considers more dynamic. In his opinion, "the recognition of the potential validity of local values must be interpreted in the light of the recognition of international values" and vice-versa (Vieira de Almeida, 2005: 71). Underlying this stays the idea that the *critical internationalism* "should establish and regulate the cultural trade with

all the cultures involved". In simultaneous, "local cultures, with their own cultural values, will act mainly and fundamentally as the "critical filter" of this dispersed influence" (Almeida, 2005: 71).

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

The same author (1986) also draws our attention to the speech on architecture delivered by Carlos Ramos in 1933, in which the later quoted Emile Schreiber's statement: "international penetration, national interpretation, *voilà* the whole secret of harmony in the world of tomorrow". This affirmation could very well be considered as a definition of *critical internationalism* (Almeida, 2005: 71). It also means that the critical awareness at the foundation of this notion dates back to, at least, the beginning of the 1930s.

On the other hand, Tzonis & Lefaivre (1986: 7) place the theoretical foundations of the *critical regionalism* in an earlier period, that is to say, in the previous decade. In their opinion, a glimpse of those foundations could be already caught in Lewis Mumford's work, namely, in his book *Sticks and Stones, a Study of American Architecture and Civilization* (1924). In this book, Mumford proposed a project based on the concept of "the interaction between popular culture and its place of origin", *i. e.*, he apparently defended the existence of regional architecture.

However, these issues gained theoretical significance in the post-war time, with Giedion's (1954) reflections on the movement he called "the new regionalism". Giedon argued that modern architecture conserved the mark of its regional origin, even in its most international element. From his viewpoint (1954: 209-211), the coloured horizontal plans of the Dutch fields and the vertical plans of the traditional buildings' plain façades would explain Mondrian's "neutral forms" or Theo van Doesburg's abstract forms. Similarly, the works of both Tony Garnier and August Perret, that are two possible examples, are directly based on French building tradition. Giedion had no doubt that "the regional contributions may lead to a universal architectural concept."

The following year, Paul Ricoeur (1955) reflected upon globalisation and raised the question "how to become modern and to return to sources; how to revive an old, dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization" (apud Frampton, 1983: 148). In the definition he proposed of the *critical regionalism*, Frampton (1983: 148) draws our attention to the fact that, in the words of Ricoeur, "a 'world culture' will only originate, through a cross-fertilization between rooted *culture,* on the one hand, and universal civilisation on the other", so that "a regional culture must also be a form of world culture". In contrast to Frampton, who considered this "proposition as paradoxical and impure", Pedro Vieira de Almeida agreed with Ricouer. From the point of view of Vieira de Almeida, the only mistake of Ricouer's theory was that he didn't understand the filtering role that this "rooted culture" could play.

Vieira de Almeida reminded us that he had already defended the notion of a plural post-modernity as early as 1984. This notion "would have as consequence, or as characteristic, the emergence of a new assumption of regional values of modernity, not only as a proposal – as embraced by critical regionalism –, but also, as a specific reading filter. This filter would deliberately reject the cultural hegemonic attitudes representing an assumed - but by then already fictional - centrality that both the modernism and the post-modernism had accepted without hesitation" (Almeida, 2008: 86). Moreover, this filter was also called *critical internationalism* by Vieira de Almeida.

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Regardless of our definition of the critical tools used or of our choice to consider the definition of critical regionalism and critical internationalism as a very important right from the beginning, it assumes crucial to understand the difficulties and challenges that were posed by the chronological delimitation of the period under study.

The field of architectural culture is a crossroads of realities that can be only understood by going back to the previous century and to the multiple paths opened by the first vanguards.

Seldom has history witnessed the same simmering of artistic ideas and proposals that characterized the first decades of the 20th century. Multiple movements believing to be ground-breaking and potentially universal mushroomed everywhere, with an epicenter in Paris. Moreover, or shall we say, therefore, it was a time characterized by wars: the First World War, from 1914-1918; the October Revolution of 1917; the Greece-Turkey War of 1919-1922; the scars left by the war with the USA and the English Ultimatum that marked the entrance of Spain and Portugal, respectively, into the 20th century; and, finally, the emergence of the totalitarian regimes that spread everywhere in the 1920s. Those times were dangerous but, in simultaneous, stimulating in order to both live in and to serve as case studies.

The presence of vernacular architecture as a recurrent source of inspiration was less visible during this time than it had been at the turn of the century or from the 1930s, but its presence was, nevertheless, felt, as our research aims to demonstrate.

Indeed, we argue that the first three decades of the 20th century were marked by a strong presence of the vanguards, in addition to having also constituted a fertile soil for the resolution of problems of cultural or national identity. Vernacular forms played an important role in this process, due to the richness of their formal repertory, the consolidated experience of lifestyles they reflect, and also due to the fact they can be identified with some form of original purity that contrasts with erudite forms. These times also assisted to the reinvention of the house, in the order to become a modern and confortable character.

Our research ends at the beginning of the 1930s, when the modern movement, that had a special association with international architecture and the CIAM, become historically hegemonic, leading to the present reevaluation of the architecture of the time.

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We infer an unexpected proximity between the Portuguese and the Greek cases, based on the survey made of the architecture produced during this period in the

four countries in study. The relation between the Spanish and the Italian cases is less direct than we expected initially.

Nevertheless, we infer the same interest for vernacular architecture, the same search of solutions for single-family houses, the same fascination for traditional forms. Capri, Ibiza, Aegina or Algarve gave the image of a pleasant tradition to the constructors of the new modernity.

For instance, Capri and Ibiza became election places for both artists and intellectuals. Their landscape was depicted, and served as case study within the debates on the constitution of a Mediterranean architecture with Mediterranean roots. (Sabatino 2013: 207).

However, this Southern tradition offered itself to the North that visits and absolves it, and motivated its reappearance in new architectures, sometimes combined with its own past.

In that period, the use of vernacular as source of modernity was not exclusive to the South, but can be found everywhere, from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean. However, the cubic volumes of the whitewashed walls characteristic of the Southern architecture were an ideal instrument to give an historical thickness to the new proposals of a rationalist architecture, thus representing a convenient discovery for everybody.

In 1922, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti praised the *practical style* of vernacular architecture of Capri, "for its rational rather than picturesque qualities", classifying it as a futuristic island (Sabatino, 2013: 207). In the same year, the Portuguese António Ferro[1], described Olhão, in Algarve, as a cubist peasant village (see Agarez, 2012: 72). This town has frequently been associated with modernism. In 1934, an English traveller wrote that the architecture of Olhão "could give points to many a modern young architect priding himself on the functional use of the materials." (Gordon, 1934: 212 apud Agarez, 2012: 70).

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[1] António Ferro, a journalist related to Futurism, will be the future director of the the Portuguese governmental institution Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional [Secretariat of National Propaganda].

For Marinetti, the vernacular architecture of Capri offered beauty and freedom, as it rejected "any kind of order reminiscent of classicism" (apud Sabatino, 2013: 208). Nevertheless, we argue that the classical tradition was eventually always present in of Southern architecture at its own right or through its vernacular reflex.

Figure 1. Beira Alta house. Photo publishd in *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal.* Lisboa: Sindicato Nacional dos Arquitectos, 1961

This and other suspicions slowly arose during our study. For example, the idea that the secular architectures that were defined in Southern Europe and Mediterranean would predominantly correspond to a poetic of *thick walls*, in which mass is a determinant element in the perception of space. (Almeida, 2010)*.* As we have already demonstrated, this is the case of Portugal, as concerns vernacular architecture. (Maia, Cardoso & Leal, 2013)[2].

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[2] We refer to the project *Popular Architecture in Portugal. A Critical Look* (PTDC/AUR-AQI/099063/2008) that was carried out between 2010 and 2013. This project explored two expressive parameters of architecture: the *thickness* – that configures a poetry of thick walls or, by contrast, a poetry of thin walls – and the *transition-space* (See: Almeida, 2010, 2012 and 2013; Maia, Cardoso and Leal 2013).

We further suspect of a constant presence of *transition-space* more to the South. This space that "is neither internal nor external" is always present in Southern architecture, since antiquity. In the peristyle, on a private level, or in the stoa, on a public level, the *transition-space* translates an ancestral lifestyle in the Mediterranean (Almeida, 2013 [1963]: 92).

Vieira de Almeida, who created this concept, quoted in this respect Eglo Benincasa, who explained that the relation with the external is very different between North and South, corresponding to distinct lifestyles. For the Southern man, *life in the open air* doesn't translate the necessity of contact with nature that is essential further North. In the South the *life in the open* are air evolves "in an open space protected from the Sumer sun and the Winter wind, we can call it as semi-open". Thus, from his point of view, "a problem that should be of great significance in Southern architecture is to keep the maximal intimacy in open environments." (Benincasa apud Almeida, 2013 [1963]: 92).

Figure 2. Dimitris Pikionis, Acropolis paths

These are the spaces, defined as *transition-space* by Vieira de Almeida that came up in a great variety of forms, translating the richness of an ancestral lifestyle in the South.

This was perceived by the Italian architects, who found the fundaments of modernity in the combination of the vernacular *Mediterraneità* with the classica G*recità* (see: Sabatino, 2013: 208).

Peristyles, terraces, pergolas and trellis are connected to porticos, and teach a vernacular lesson full of classical references.

In order to illustrate the point, see the work of the Portuguese architect Raúl Lino that is centered on the middle class single-family house. Framed by the British *domestic revival* and by its German version, this work was totally modern at the time. But Lino's houses includes, in this modernity, the characteristics of an architecture of light and sun, of thick walls, *transition-space* and traditional materials such as *azulejo* [glazed tile] he learnt during his trips in Southern Portugal.
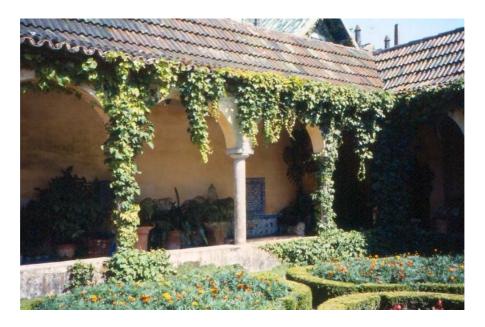

Figure 3. Raul Lino, Cypress house, Sintra, Portugal ©Pedro Vieira de Almeida

Also exemplary in this respesct is the work of Aristótelis Zachos, a contemporary architect to Lino, who redrew architectures that he wanted Greek, trying to ignore, perhaps because of a patriotism feeling that vernacular Greek also assimilated the Ottoman tradition in its totality.

Modern *Portuguese house*, *Catalan house* and *Greek house* were invented at the beginning of a very nationalist century. The aim was to understand the tradicional dwelling forms in order to reinvent single familly house based on them.

In the 1930s, the debate in Italy focused on the classical-vernacular Mediterranean *patio-house*. This house type, characteristic of the Mediterranean region since Ancient Antiquity, "proved to be adaptable to the functional requirements of modern dwelling, but it also facilitated a typical Mediterranean lifestyle that involved spending part of the day in the open air" (Sabatino, 2013: 201). That is to say, it responds to the necessity of an external existence of controlled intimacy.

Figure 4. Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini, Villa-Studio for an artist, Milan, V Triennale, 1933. Published in Alberto Sartoris, Encyclopédie de l' architecture nouvelle, vol. 1, Milan, Hoepli, 1948 and later in Sabatino, 2013.

In these years, in Italy, the *casa-patio* solved apparently the single-family housing problem for general satisfaction: of the rationalist architects that saw in it "an expression of effective planning with limited space"; of the nationalists and of the historicists that interpreted it as "an expression of *Italianità* that could be flaunted to the rest of the world" (Sabatino, 2013: 201).

Pikionis, in Greece, who belonged also to the 1930's generation, was closely related to vernacular architecture, which he considered as expressiveness of *thick walls*, the experiences of *transition-spaces,* the intensity of the clear-dark effects of shading elements that recall a lifestyle with a strong Southern character.

At this stage of our work, we are still not sure about the existence of a Southern architecture. However, we argue that there exists a Southern lifestyle. Indeed, we are not completely sure about the existence of the South, but anyway, it seems to us a good invention.

Acknowledgments

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