

JOÃO MENDES RIBEIRO, UN ARQUITECTO QUE TRABALLA NAS ARTES ESCÉNICAS

JOÃO MENDES RIBEIRO, AN ARCHITECT WHO WORKS WITH THE PERFORMING ARTS

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Resumo

Entrevista ao arquitecto portugués João Mendes Ribeiro na que se profundiza nas conexións entre a arquitectura e a escenografía. Dende a súa ampla experiencia, fala das diferenzas, dos procesos e metodoloxías que son común a ámbolas disciplinas e aqueles aspectos que claramente as diferencian. Repasando criticamente os seus proxectos arquitectónicos e de escenografía, dende os seus inicios ata as súas últimas obras ligadas á rehabilitación, establécense relacións e trázase a súa evolución. Máis alá dunha lectura cronolóxica, esta revisión permite entender, dende a súa ollada como arquitecto, as transferencias da escenografía ás súas obras construídas.

Abstract

In this article, the Portuguese architect João Mendes Ribeiro explores the connections between architecture and set design. Drawing on his wide experience, he talks about the differences, the processes and the methods shared by both disciplines, and those that clearly set them apart. Offering a critical perspective of his architectural and set design projects, from his early beginnings through to his latest work in the field of restoration, he identifies relationships and traces their development. Taking an architectural approach and going beyond a chronological overview, this article offers an insight into how elements of set design have been incorporated into his buildings.

Palabras clave

Arquitectura, Escenografía, Teatro, Rehabilitación, Portugal

Keywords

Architecture, Set design, Theatre, Restoration, Portugal

Rodeados polos libros do profesor Juan Luis Dalda na Biblioteca da Escola de Arquitectura da Coruña, conversamos co arquitecto portugués João Mendes Ribeiro (Coimbra, 1960)¹. Hoxe dará unha charla aos novos arquitectos que agora inician a súa carreira profesional. Con entusiasmo calmado, reflexiona sobre as conexións entre os distintos ámbitos do seu traballo, as súas influencias e o pensamento crítico que subxace nas súas propostas creativas.

O teu traballo mixtura escenografía e arquitectura. Como interactúan estas dúas disciplinas? Que pasa dunha á outra?

Eu parto deste principio: son disciplinas diferentes. A concepción dunha escenografía para o teatro, a danza ou a ópera é un traballo distinto da arquitectura. Dito isto, o que me interesa é o que pode ser común, partindo desa diferenza, e sobre todo percibir de que modo, neste cruzamento disciplinar, podemos definir os límites de cada unha delas. Eu véxome sempre como un arquitecto traballando nas artes escénicas e non un escenógrafo.

Qué aspectos pensas que comparten?

Eu diría que hai ideas no meu traballo de escenografía no teatro que teñen que ver coa arquitectura. Por un lado, a cuestión da habitabilidade do espazo escénico. Isto é, eu raramente me sento na platea, onde están os espectadores a ollar de fronte ao palco. Cando proxecto, penso dende dentro do propio espazo escénico. Para min é tan importante o que se ve dende a platea como o que non, o que pasa entre os bastidores. Entendo que o que teño que facer é dar unha boa casa aos actores e nese intre, a cuestión do que está enfrente non existe.

Qué papel xoga entón o público?

É importante, obviamente, mais non o considero neste aspecto que ten que ver máis coa habitabilidade do espazo. De feito, penso que crear unha boa casa para os actores fai que, indirectamente, esa relación se transmita ao público. Outro aspecto importante é a cuestión da verdade dos materiais. Eu realmente son moi pouco escenógrafo no sentido de finxir un material. Sempre traballo con materiais verdadeiros e moitas das técnicas que utilizo veñen da arquitectura. Mais tamén aprendín moito no teatro facendo cousas lixeiras, efémeras, con fácil montaxe e desmontaxe. Isto implica unha tecnoloxía propia do teatro pero

Surrounded by books by Professor Juan Luis Dalda in the library of the University School of Architecture in A Coruña, Spain, we are talking to the Portuguese architect João Mendes Ribeiro (Coimbra, 1960)¹. Today he will be giving a talk to the new architects who are on the point of commencing their professional careers. With an air of calm enthusiasm, he discusses the connections between the different areas in which he works, his influences, and the critical thinking that underlies his creative proposals.

Your work combines set design and architecture. How do these two disciplines interact? What kind of movement is there between one and the other?

I work according to the principle that they are two different disciplines. Creating a set design for the theatre, for dance or for opera is a very different job from architecture. That said, what interests me is what they can have in common, despite these differences, and especially perceiving how we can use this crossover between disciplines to define each of their limits. I always consider myself to be an architect working in the performing arts, and not as a set designer.

What aspects do you think they share?

I think that there are ideas in my work as a set designer for the theatre that have to do with architecture. On the one hand there is the question of the habitability of the space on the stage. In other words, I rarely sit in the auditorium, where the audience sits in front the stage. I approach every project from within the stage itself. What can be seen from the auditorium is just as important to me as what can't be seen, what goes on behind the scenes. I consider that what I have to do is to make a 'good home' for the actors, and when you're doing that the question of what is in front doesn't exist.

So what is the role of the audience?

Obviously it's important, but I don't think about it in terms of what it has to do with the habitability of the space. In fact, I think that creating a 'good home' for the actors means that this relationship is transmitted to the audience, albeit indirectly. Another important issue is the authenticity of the materials. I'm not really much of a set designer in terms of how genuine the materials are. I always work with authentic materials, and many of the techniques I use come from the world of architecture. But I've also learned a lot from theatre by making light, ephemeral things, which are easy to put up and take down. This involves a kind of technology that typically belongs



01 Olga Rorize Companhia Olga Roriz, João Mendes Ribeiro (escenografía), "A Sesta" (2 esceas), Instituto das Artes/Ministério de Cultura, Quadrienal de Praga, 2007



01 Olga Rorize Companhia: Olga Roriz, João Mendes Ribeiro (set design), "A Sesta" (2 scenes), Instituto das Artes/Ministério de Cultura, Quadrienal de Praga, 2007

tamén é un aspecto que interesa transportar logo para a arquitectura, sobre todo cando se trata dunha arquitectura efémera.

Eu insisto moito sobre o feito de percibir como os obxectos se relacionan co corpo dos intérpretes e os vínculos que se forman cun corpo en movemento. Hai coreografías que desean o movemento do actor no espazo a partir dunha relación directa co obxecto (Fig. 1). Dalgunha forma implica desmontar a rixidez da vista frontal do teatro á italiana para conseguir visualizar o obxecto escénico desde varios ángulos, tema propio do cinema.

Falando de arquitectura, a Casa do Cha no Castelo de Montemor-o-Velho² aparece como un obxecto escénico que, inserto nun espazo existente, xera novas dinámicas. Ti tamén ves este paralelismo do proxecto arquitectónico cos recursos escenográficos?

Ese foi o primeiro proxecto de arquitectura que fixen nun contexto histórico. A idea era volver a habitar o Pazo das Infantas, que é unha ruína do século XII, pero cun obxecto que é relativamente autónomo. Establece relacións coa ruína e simultaneamente é reversible. Non toca nas paredes, non toca no solo, construído con materiais opostos... mais aínda así permite habitar aquel espazo e, polo tanto, aquí aparece a cuestión da habitabilidade. Aquí trátanse moitos aspectos, como o espazo de transición entre a envolvente e o interior, que se fai cunha escaleira deseñada con pequenas sutilezas que teñen que ver coa diferenciación simbólica nesta transición. Ou por exemplo, a escaleira moi inclinada

to the theatre, but it's also something that's interesting to transfer to architecture, especially when you're working with ephemeral structures.

I put a lot of emphasis on perceiving how props are related to the bodies of the performers, and the connections that are created with a body in movement. There are choreographies that design the way the actor moves within a space based on a direct relationship with the prop (Fig. 1). In some way this involves breaking down the inflexible forward-facing view that is so typical of the Italian theatre, so that you can visualise the objects within the scene from different angles, in the same way as you do with the cinema.

Talking about architecture, the Casa do Cha in the castle of Montemor-o-Velho² looks like a stage element that has been inserted into an existing space, and which creates new dynamics. Do you also see this parallel between architectural projects and the techniques of set design?

This was the first architectural project I carried out within a historical context. The idea was to restore the Pazo das Infantas, which had been a ruin since the twelfth century, but with an object that was relatively independent, that was related to the ruin but which at the same time was reversible. It doesn't touch the walls or the ground, and it is made of different types of materials. But even so, it makes it possible for this space to be inhabited, and therefore the question of habitability arises. Here we're dealing with a lot of different aspects, such as the transition between the envelope and the interior, which is achieved by means of a staircase designed with subtle details that are connected to the symbolic differences found in this transition. Or for

que dá acceso a unha xanela e que, no fondo, é para marcar simbolicamente un primeiro piso que existiu (Fig. 2). Trátase de habitar o espazo da xanela, iso si, dunha forma moi condicionada, porque a subida é moi inclinada. Tamén ten que ver coas teses de Dan Graham en canto á relación entre o público e o privado³. Ese espazo intimista é un espazo doméstico mais á vez, está baseado no espazo público, xa que tamén se pode transformar nun palco escénico. Polo tanto, está dando una sensación de intimidade e á vez, de exhibición.

Recursos moi próximos ao mundo da escenografía, non?

Trátase de aspectos simbólicos moi relacionados co espazo escénico porque parte de nocións abstractas, mudas, que non comunican, e que só a partir da acción dos actores, a partir do movemento do corpo, cobran a súa funcionalidade, a escala e a súa razón de existir. Isto conduce a un tema que me interesa moito: nunca fago nada figurativo. Prefiro a abstracción para que cada espectador constrúa o seu propio escenario. Dalgunha forma é acometer esa concepción do espazo para o imaxinario de cada un.

A escaleira é un elemento que protagoniza varias das túas intervencións escenográficas e arquitectónicas, mesmo nos últimos proxectos de rehabilitación, como o Hotel da Viña Torre de Palma⁴.

A escaleira é un tema que para todos os arquitectos é fantástico. De feito, cada proxecto é moi distinto. Na escaleira da Casa do Cha ten moito máis que ver coa idea da experiencia. Hai outros traballos nos que esa condición non é fundamental. Por exemplo, a escaleira como transición de espazos e que ve potenciada esa relación a partir dun corpo en movemento. A escaleira está asociada a movemento, necesariamente. Implica decisións como a escolla dun material, a forma en como se deseña, se é dun tramo ou unha escaleira quebrada, se é comfortable ou difícil de subir..., asociacións que remiten sobre todo á experiencia (Fig. 3).

Os quioscos para a Exposición Internacional do 1998 en Lisboa tamén aparecen como unha intervención abstracta na escenografía urbana (Fig. 4).

Aquí hai unha relación clarísima con algúns obxectos escénicos. Trátase dunha peza moi abstracta que, a partir dun conxunto de aperturas, altera a súa escala e permite recoñecer o uso dese obxecto. Á súa vez,

example, the steep staircase that leads to a window that really serves to symbolically mark a first floor that was once there (Fig. 2). The aim is to inhabit the space of the window, admittedly in a highly conditioned way, because the staircase leading up to it is very steep. It also has to do with the ideas of Dan Graham regarding the relationship between the public and the private³. This intimate space is a domestic space, but at the same time it's based on public space, as it can also be transformed into a stage. So it offers a sense of intimacy, and at the same time a sense of exhibition.

These are techniques that are very close to the world of set design, aren't they?

They are symbolic aspects that are very closely related to the space on the stage, because they're based on abstract, mute ideas that do not communicate, and it's only through the action of the actors, through the movement of their bodies, that they acquire a sense of function, a sense of scale, and a raison d'être. This leads to a subject that I'm really interested in: I never create anything that's figurative. I prefer abstraction, so that each member of the audience can create their own scenery. In some way it's about achieving that concept of space for each person's imagination.

The staircase is an element that's at the forefront of several of your architectural projects and projects for the stage, and even in your latest renovation projects, such as the Hotel da Viña Torre de Palma⁴.

Staircases are something that are amazing for all architects. In fact, each project is very different. The staircase in the Casa do Cha has a lot more to do with the idea of experience. There are other projects in which this condition is not essential. For example, the staircase as the transition between spaces, and which is enhanced by the relationship with a body in movement. The staircase is associated with movement, by necessity. It involves decisions such as the choice of material, the way in which it is designed, if it is an entire section or a staircase in separate sections, or if it is easy or difficult to walk up; these are all associated ideas that refer, above all, to the experience (Fig. 03).

The kiosks for the International Exhibition of 1998 in Lisbon also have the appearance of an abstract intervention on an urban stage (Fig. 04).

Here there is a very clear relationship with certain stage objects. This is a very abstract object, which is based on a series of openings that alter its scale, and make it possible to recognise the use of this object. In turn, it also

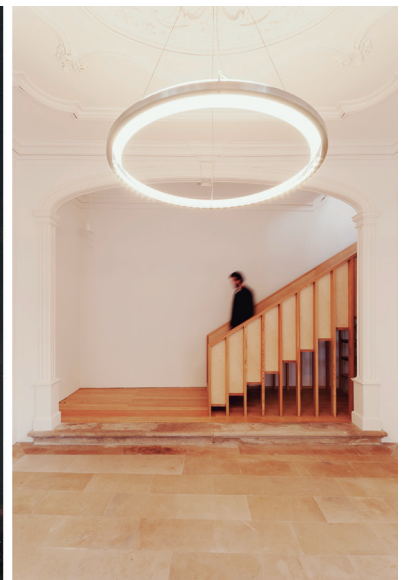


02 João Mendes Ribeiro, Casa de Chá, Intervención no Paço das Infantas, Castelo de Montemor-o-Velho, 2000

02 João Mendes Ribeiro, Casa de Chá, Paço das Infantas, castle of Montemor-o-Velho, 2000.



03 Izq. João Mendes Ribeiro, Reabilitación da Casa da Escrita, Coimbra, Portugal, 2010. Dta. João Mendes Ribeiro (escenografía), "Entrada de Palhaços", Teatro Nacional de S. João, Porto, 2000



03 Left: João Mendes Ribeiro, renovation of the Casa da Escrita, Coimbra, Portugal, 2010. Right: João Mendes Ribeiro (set design), "Entrada de Palhaços", National Theatre of S. João, Oporto, 2000.



04 João Mendes Ribeiro, Quioscos para o Parque EXPO' 98, Lisboa, 1998



04 João Mendes Ribeiro, kiosks for the EXPO' 98 park, Lisbon, 1998.

xera tamén unha escala de relación co corpo totalmente distinta. Ese é dos exemplos que sempre cito de paso dun obxecto escénico ao espazo urbano. Tanto dende o punto de vista do concepto como das tecnoloxías utilizadas, está moi asociado á miña experiencia do teatro. Foi un concurso que gañei porque defendín esta idea: como tiña que ser para unha exposición que estaba prevista para un tempo preciso de seis meses, eu propuxen un proxecto que era desmontable e transportable para outro lugar, premisas fundamentais no teatro. Esta foi a idea forte do proxecto porque parecía que non tiña moito sentido construír uns quioscos só para seis meses. Parecía oportuno poder utilizalos noutros contextos. Había que considerar que estes podían ser moi diferentes e entón pensei que un quiosco abstracto era máis fácil de implantar en calquera sitio, en calquera situación urbana. Así que a proposta é unha peza abstracta e autónoma. Ademais, permite diversas variacións, porque era un quiosco pensado para cumprir usos distintos. A partir dunha regra creada para a asociación de módulos, podía disporse dun quiosco de distintas dimensións. Este feito está moi asociado á miña experiencia. De feito, na exposición pública dos proxectos, os membros do xurado non estaban convencidos da solución porque pensaban que era un sistema que eu tiña inventado, que non sería posible facelo. Entón, leveinos ao teatro para que visen unha peza que eu tiña deseñada e convencelos das posibilidades do proxecto. Foi así como me adxudicaron o concurso.

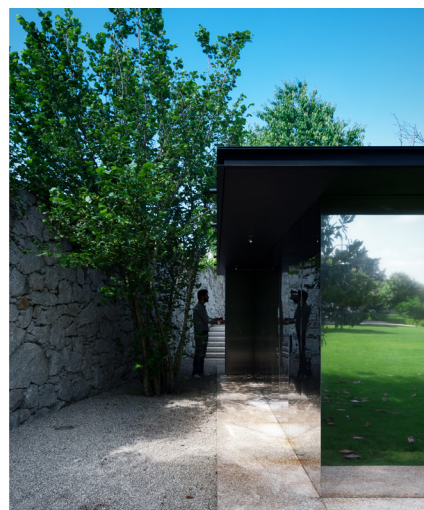
Semella, sen embargo, que nas últimas obras de rehabilitación propós intervencións cun carácter máis de permanencia que nos primeiros traballos.

generates a completely different scale in relation to the body. These are two examples that I always mention in terms of transferring a stage object to an urban space. In terms of the design and the technologies used, it is closely connected to my experience in the theatre. This was a competition that I won because I defended this idea. That it had to be for an exhibition planned for a period of exactly six months, and I presented a project that could be taken down and moved to another location, aspects that are essential in the world of theatre. This was the strong point of the project, because it seemed like it didn't make much sense to build a series of kiosks only for six months. It made more sense to be able to use them in other contexts. They had to be very different, and I thought that an abstract kiosk would be much easier to set up anywhere, in any type of urban situation. So the design was for an abstract, autonomous structure. Also, it can be adapted in different ways, because it was a kiosk designed for different uses. Based on a series of guidelines for how the modules worked together, it was possible to create a kiosk with different dimensions. This is something that's closely related to my experience. In fact, when the different designs were presented to the public, the members of the jury weren't convinced by this solution, because they thought it was a system that I had invented, and that it wouldn't be possible to build it. So I took them to the theatre so that they could see a piece I'd designed, and to convince them about the possibilities of the project. That was how I won the competition.

But it seems that in your latest renovation work, you propose interventions that are more permanent in nature than your earlier work.



05 João Mendes Ribeiro, Piscina, Chamusca da Beira, Oliveira do Hospital, Coimbra, 2010-13



05 João Mendes Ribeiro, swimming pool, Chamusca da Beira, Oliveira do Hospital, Coimbra, 2010-13.

É verdade. Este recurso que uso nas primeiras rehabilitacións, xerando unha peza autónoma, moi abstracta, penso que responde tamén a un recelo pola miña parte en intervir en contextos tan comprometidos. Era moi novo e pensaba que se non saía ben, podería retirarse... Dá pudor intervir en contextos con tanta carga histórica e penso que isto estaba tamén no meu inconsciente. Sen embargo, hai un traballo de transición, o Centro de Artes Visuais en Coimbra, no que hai que intervir nun edificio de 1548, con moitas actuacións previas⁵. Neste caso, propónse a actuación no edificio existente, un contedor de gran calidade construtiva, mais no que o espazo interior ten profundas alteracións de acordo cos diversos usos. Por tanto, intervénse a partir da instalación, pensada de acordo ás necesidades contemporáneas pero que á súa vez, sendo facilmente reversible. Se o edificio muda de función, pódese retirar a intervención e transformar de novo o espazo interior. Isto parte de entender o edificio existente como un contedor con diversas posibilidades de habitación. A partir deste proxecto, traballamos máis coa idea de síntese entre pasado e presente, entre tradición e modernidade⁶. E nos últimos traballos isto acontece de forma máis clara, como na Piscina de Chamusca da Beira (Fig. 5).

Que consideracións específicas tes en conta na intervención sobre o existente nestas últimas obras?

Hai un tema moi importante: o programa do edificio. Se o programa é xusto e equilibrado coa preexistencia, temos un campo moi favorable. Se non, é un problema. Da propia historia dos edificios sacamos sempre opcións

That's true. I think that the system I used in my first renovations, creating autonomous, highly abstract objects, was a result of a certain reluctance on my part to get involved in such committed contexts. I was very young, and I thought that if they didn't turn out right, they could be removed. It's quite daunting to get involved in contexts of such historical importance, and I think that this was something that was there in the back of my mind. However, there is a transition project, at the Centre for Visual Arts in Coimbra, Portugal, where I had to work with a building dating from 1548, which had undergone a large amount of renovation work⁵. In this case, the idea was to work with the existing building, with an excellent construction quality, rather than on the interior space, which had been radically altered for different types of uses. So the intervention was based on the installation, according to modern needs, but which at the same time could be easily reversed. If the building were to be used for a different function, the elements could be removed, once again transforming the internal space. This idea is based on considering the existing building as a container with different possibilities in terms of its occupation. After completing this project, we worked more with the idea of creating a synthesis between the past and the present, between tradition and modernity⁶. And in my latest work this can be seen more clearly, such as in the swimming pool in Chamusca da Beira (Fig.5).

What specific aspects did you take into account when working with the existing elements in these latest projects?

One really important aspect is the layout of the building. If the layout is correct and in balance with the existing structure, then it's very easy to work. Otherwise, it's a problem. We always come up with modern options based on

actuais. Hai mesmo situacións increíbles. Por exemplo, estamos agora para recuperar unhas estufas no Xardín Botánico de Coimbra⁷. Nós tomamos opcións de proxecto como abrir unha porta porque consideramos que é preciso relacionar o edificio cunha plataforma, e logo descubrimos na obra que xa existía e estaba oculta. A lectura do edificio axuda dunha forma moi empírica aos arquitectos, mais saber ollar é importante. Eu atopo cruzamentos nos últimos traballos entre a historia e a resposta ás novas necesidades.

Podemos falar de influencias directas no teu traballo?

Eu penso que estou moi influído polo arquitecto Fernando Távora. Fun o seu asistente durante sete anos⁸. A súa influencia no meu traballo de rehabilitación é moi importante. Ten que ver precisamente con ollar o edificio e percibir as súas capacidades de transformación, non tanto na tentativa de establecer dicotomías, dous tempos diferentes, senón máis de continuidade entre pasado e presente.

De onde xurde entón o interese pola escenografía?

Foi unha casualidade, porque eu daba clase na Escola do Porto. Ricardo Pais, que é un director de teatro moi coñecido en Portugal, daba clases no curso de antropoloxía do espazo e foi el o que me convidou para facer a primeira escenografía e xa nunca máis parei. Para min era un mundo moi descoñecido. Os meus primeiros traballos de escenografía eran proxectos de arquitectura. Despois aprendín que había procesos completamente diferentes. Unha das grandes diferenzas coa arquitectura é que na escenografía un traballa con outros creativos. O deseñador de escenas ou o coreógrafo é o que invita ao escenógrafo. Non existe a figura do promotor, senón que este é un axente creativo tamén. Por outra parte, hai unha relación moi intensa cos actores ou cos bailaríns. Cando fago arquitectura, eu mido o espazo co meu corpo, cando fago escenografía, midoo espazo co corpo dos bailaríns ou dos intérpretes, porque eles existen, son os que van facer xusto ese movemento. Constrúo o obxecto específico para eles. Sempre hai unha relación moi directa dos obxectos escénicos cos intérpretes a partir dun proceso creativo. Ao principio, comezaba co deseño do proxecto completo como en arquitectura e despois confrontábame cos mestres carpinteiros dos teatros e eles tiñan solucións moito máis intelixentes e interesantes para resolver o problema. E entón deixei de facelo. Agora cando estou proxectando vou continuamente da oficina ao taller para estudar a

the history of the buildings. There are even some incredible situations that can arise. For example, we're currently working on restoring a number of heaters in the Botanical Garden of Coimbra⁷. We looked at options such as opening a doorway, because we thought it was necessary to connect the building with a platform, and then we discovered that it already existed, but it was concealed. Studying the building helps architects in a very empirical way, but it's important knowing how to look. I find crossovers in my latest work between history and responding to new needs.

It is possible to talk about direct influences in your work?

I think that I'm very influenced by the architect Fernando Távora. I was his assistant for seven years⁸. He has a very important influence on my renovation work. It has to do with looking at the building and perceiving its capacity for transformation, not so much in attempting to identify dichotomies, two different times, but instead a sense of continuity between the past and the present.

So how did you become interested in set design?

It was something that came about by chance, because I was lecturing at the School of Architecture in Oporto. Ricardo Pais, who's a very well known theatre director in Portugal, was giving lectures in the course on the anthropology of space, and he invited me to create my first set design, and since then I haven't stopped. It was a world I knew nothing about. My first set designs were architecture projects. Then I learned that it involved completely different processes. One of the major differences with architecture is that in set design, you work with other creative. The scenic designer or choreographer is the person who invites the set designer. There isn't a developer, but instead you have a creative agent as well. Also, there's a very intense relationship with the actors or dancers. When I create architecture, I measure the space with my body; when I'm creating a set design, I measure the space with the bodies of the dancers or actors, because they exist, and they are the ones who will be moving through the space. I create a specific object for them. There is always a very direct relationship between the objects on the stage and the performers, through a creative process. Initially, I started with the design of the whole project like you do in architecture, and then I met the carpenters who worked in the theatres, and they had much more intelligent and interesting solutions to the problem. So then I stopped doing it. Now, when I'm designing, I'm constantly going from my office to the workshop to study the possibility

posibilidade de construír no que estou traballando. É unha metodoloxía que na arquitectura, infelizmente, case nunca é posible.

É un traballo máis inmediato tamén, como por exemplo no Centro de Artes Contemporáneo nas Azores⁹ (Fig. 6).

Si. Hai unha relación moi directa entre os dous tempos: o da creación e o da construción. Na arquitectura, estes dous tempos, de proxecto e construción, son completamente distintos. Hai outro aspecto que me parece tamén importante, que é non perder a noción do todo, co global do espazo escénico. O que máis me interesa é esta capacidade de traballar en elementos efémeros, asociados á idea de evento e do corpo en movemento.

Como ves a arquitectura nun futuro máis ou menos inmediato? Cal será o papel do pequeno estudio fronte á grande empresa?

Eu diría que moitas cousas se alteraron nestes últimos anos. Non creo que o futuro sexa a creación de grandes empresas, que proxectan para calquera parte do mundo de forma indistinta. Ou polo menos, eu desexo que haxa lugar para outro tipo de arquitecturas, que sexan máis locais, que teñan que ver coas tecnoloxías e materiais locais e cunha forma máis directa de relacionarse cos habitantes da cidade e coas persoas que habitan os espazos. Hai temas emerxentes, por exemplo, a rehabilitación. Penso que é algo fundamental hoxe. Non construír máis en canto non se rehabilite o existente ten que ver coa sostibilidade da propia cidade. Non podemos estar a estender a construción de forma infinita e ter o centro abandonado. Sen embargo, ás veces intervir nos centros históricos é case unha imposibilidade porque temos que cumprir un conxunto de requisitos que tornan difícil a adaptación do edificio ás novas necesidades. Eu entendo que rehabilitar implica transformar, necesariamente. Dar respostas novas significa alterar as condicións preexistentes. Eu penso que a cidade debe volver ao centro, pero adaptándose ás novas circunstancias.

E como se introducen estes cambios nas escolas de arquitectura? Pensas que deberían de considerarse especificamente na formación xunto co enfoque máis habitual de construción de obra nova?

Nas escolas moitas veces traballamos con propostas que non teñen que ver co noso día a día. Eu penso

of building what I'm working on. Unfortunately, it's a method that is hardly ever possible in the world of architecture.

It's also a more immediate type of work, such as in the Centre for Contemporary Art in the Azores⁹ (Fig. 06).

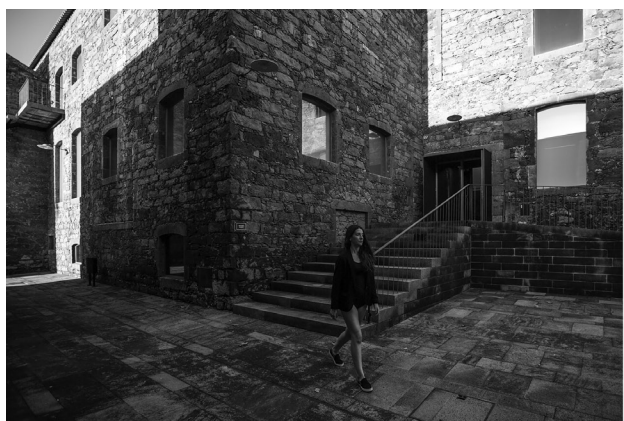
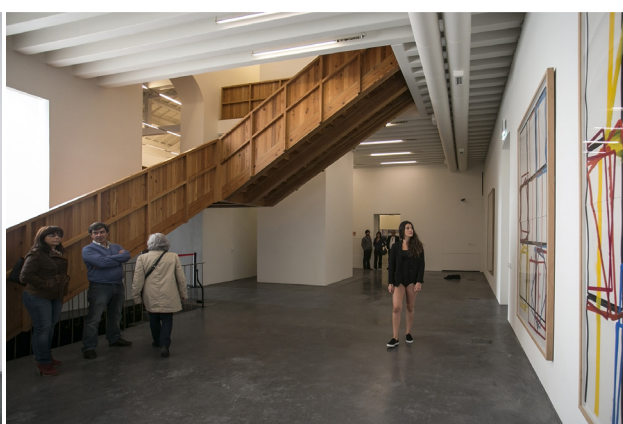
Yes. There's a very direct relationship between the two moments: the moment of creation and the moment of construction. In architecture, these two moments, for planning and construction, are completely different. There is another aspect that I also think is important, which is not losing sight of the whole, of the global nature of the space on the stage. What interests me the most is the ability to work with ephemeral elements, associated with the idea of the performance and of the body in motion.

How do you see the world of architecture in the more or less immediate future? What role will small studios be playing in comparison to large companies?

I think that a lot of things have changed in recent years. I don't think the future will be about the creation of large companies, designing for any part of the world indistinctly. Or at least I hope that there will be room for another type of architecture, on a more local scale, that have to do with local technologies and materials and a more direct way of relating to the local inhabitants and the people who inhabit these spaces. There are new issues that are gradually emerging, such as renovation. I think that this is something essential today. Not building more without renovating what's already there has to do with the sustainability of the city itself. We can't keep building outwards and leaving the centre in an abandoned state. However, sometimes it's virtually impossible to intervene in historical centres, because we have to comply with a series of requirements that make it difficult to adapt the building to new needs. I understand that renovating has to involve a transformation. Offering new solutions means altering the existing conditions. I think that cities have to return to the centre, while adapting to new situations.

And how do you introduce these changes into schools of architecture? Do you think that they are aspects that should be specifically included on courses, together with the more usual approach towards building new projects?

In schools of architecture, we often work with proposals that have nothing to do with our daily lives. I think



06 Fotografias referentes á performance "Tarde", de André Guedes, apresentada pola performer Luzia Pereira da Silva. Obra da Coleção António Cachola e exposta no Arquipélago-Centro de Artes Contemporâneas no âmbito da exposição: Um Horizonte de Proximidades - uma topologia a partir da Coleção António Cachola

06 Photos from the performance of "Tarde", by André Guedes, presented by the performer Luzia Pereira da Silva. Pieces from the António Cachola collection, exhibited at the Arquipélago-Centro de Artes Contemporâneas as a part of the exhibition titled: Um Horizonte de Proximidades – uma topologia a partir da Coleção António Cachola.

que a cidade tamén se pode facer con pequenos exemplos. As pequenas intervencións poden ser máis importantes que as grandes. Mais é certo que a formación está moi enfocada cara a obra nova e aínda falta por facer esa reflexión. A gran dificultade das escolas de arquitectura é que teñen que formar para traballar en distintas escalas e programas diversos, dar instrumentos aos alumnos para afrontar todo tipo de intervencións e considero que a rehabilitación é un dos temas clave de hoxe.

O traballo de Mendes Ribeiro, desde as diversas perspectivas que se aborda, sexa esta a académica ou a da práctica profesional, reflicte un achegamento á arquitectura que incorpora sen complexos aspectos aprendidos no ámbito da escena teatral. O arquitecto traballa nas artes escénicas e contaxia aos proxectos arquitectónicos cualidades propias destas, como a reflexión sobre o efímero das accións humanas ou o movemento dos corpos como definidor do espazo. As conexións de ida e volta entre ámbolos mundos define a traxectoria deste arquitecto portugués, autor dunha obra radicalmente contemporánea.

that the city can also be created through small examples. Small scale interventions can be more important than large scale ones. But it's true that the training in schools is more focused on creating new projects, and that this still needs to be given some consideration. The big problem facing schools of architecture is that they have to train people to work at different levels and with different types of projects, preparing students to deal with any type of intervention, and I think that renovation is one of the key issues today.

The work of Mendes Ribeiro, seen from the different perspectives he applies, either as an academic or as a professional architect, reflects an approach towards architecture that seamlessly incorporates aspects learned from the world of theatrical set design. The architect works with the performing arts and transmits these ideas to his architectural projects, such as the ephemeral nature of human action or the way in which the movement of bodies defines space. This two-way interaction between both worlds defines the career of this Portuguese architect, the author of radically contemporary projects.

Notas

- 1 Sobre a obra de Mendes Ribeiro véxase: Ana Tostoes, *João Mendes Ribeiro arquitecto, obras e projectos, 1996-2003* (Porto: ASA, 2003); Manuel Graça Dias, *JMR 92.02. João Mendes Ribeiro: Arquitectura e Cenografía = Architecture and Set Design* (Coimbra: XM, 2004); *Stop and Start Again. João Mendes Ribeiro: Cenografias* (Coimbra: Edição XM, 2004); Carsten Land, *Arquitectura em Lisboa e Sul de Portugal desde 1974* (Lisboa: Editorial Blau, 2005); Joao Mendes Ribeiro, *Arquitecturas em palco. Architectures on stage* (Almedina: Instituto das Artes; Ministério da Cultura, 2007); Désirée Pedro y Maria Milano, coords., *João Mendes Ribeiro* (Porto: Editora Quidnovi, 2011); Eduardo Nascimento y João Fôja, eds., *Casa da Escrita: Coimbra* (Coimbra: Câmara Municipal de Coimbra, 2013); João Mendes Ribeiro, edit., *João Mendes Ribeiro: desenhos* (Coimbra: João Mendes Ribeiro Arquitecto Lda, 2013); Menos é Mais arquitectos Associados, Lda. y João Mendes Ribeiro Arquitecto, Lda. "Arquipélago – Centro de Arte Contemporáneo," *Rita_ (Revista indexada de textos académicos)* 4 (2015): 14-18.
- 2 O proxecto Casa de Cháno Paço das Infantas en Castelo de Montemor-o-Velho (Portugal, 2000) foi finalista na II Bienal Iberoamericana de Arquitectura e Enxeñaría Civil (Ciudad de México, 2000); Primeiro Premio Arquitecto (Lisboa, 2000); finalista do PremioFAD d'Arquitectura i Interiorisme (Barcelona, 2001); e finalista do European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture – Mies Van Der Rohe Award (2001).
- 3 A Casa de Chá ten influencias claramente directas de Mies van der Rohe en cuxa arquitectura se expón a dicotomía do público e o privado, posto en relación coas propostas artísticas de Dan Graham por Colomina. Cf. Beatriz Colomina, "Doble exposición: Alteración de una casa suburbana (1978)", en *Doble exposición. Arquitectura a través del arte* (Madrid: Akal, 2006).
- 4 Hotel da Viña Torre de Palma en Monforte (Portugal, 2014). Nomeado para o European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture - Mies Van Der Rohe Award (Barcelona, 2015); Finalista

Notes

- 1 *On the work of Mendes Ribeiro see: Ana Tostoes, João Mendes Ribeiro arquitecto, obras e projectos, 1996-2003 (Porto: ASA, 2003); Manuel Graça Dias, JMR 92.02. João Mendes Ribeiro: Arquitectura e Cenografía = Architecture and Set Design (Coimbra: XM, 2004); Stop and Start Again. João Mendes Ribeiro: Cenografias (Coimbra: Edição XM, 2004); Carsten Land, Arquitectura em Lisboa e Sul de Portugal desde 1974 (Lisbon: Editorial Blau, 2005); Joao Mendes Ribeiro, Arquitecturas em palco. Architectures on stage (Almedina: Instituto das Artes; Ministério da Cultura, 2007); Désirée Pedro & Maria Milano, coords., João Mendes Ribeiro (Porto: Editora Quidnovi, 2011); Eduardo Nascimento & João Fôja, eds., Casa da Escrita: Coimbra (Coimbra: Câmara Municipal de Coimbra, 2013); João Mendes Ribeiro, ed., João Mendes Ribeiro: desenhos (Coimbra: João Mendes Ribeiro Arquitecto Lda, 2013); Menos é Mais arquitectos Associados, Lda. & João Mendes Ribeiro Arquitecto, Lda. "Arquipélago – Centro de Arte Contemporáneo," Rita_ (Revista indexada de textos académicos) 4 (2015): 14-18.*
- 2 *The design for the Casa de Chá in the Paço das Infantas in Castelo de Montemor-o-Velho (Portugal, 2000) was a finalist at the II Ibero-American Biennial of Architecture and Civil Engineering (Mexico City, 2000); first prize in the Architécti Awards (Lisbon, 2000); finalist in the FAD Architecture and Interior Design Awards (Barcelona, 2001); and finalist for the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture – Mies Van Der Rohe Award (2001).*
- 3 *The Casa de Chá is clearly influenced by Mies van der Rohe, presenting a dichotomy of public and private architecture in relation to the artistic proposals of Dan Graham by Colomina. Cf. Beatriz Colomina, "Doble exposición: Alteración de una casa suburbana (1978)", in Doble exposición. Arquitectura a través del arte (Madrid: Akal, 2006).*
- 4 *Hotel da Viña Torre de Palma in Monforte (Portugal, 2014). Nominated for the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture - Mies Van Der Rohe Award (Barcelona, 2015); finalist in the National*

- do Premio Nacional de Arquitectura em Madeira 2015 (Porto, 2015); Seleccionado no Premis FAD d'Arquitectura i Interiorisme (Barcelona, 2015); Nomeado para os Premios Construir na categoria Melhor Empreendimento Turístico (Lisboa, 2014); Mención de honor no Premio IHRU 2015 (Instituto da Habitação e da Reabilitação Urbana, na variante Reabilitação de Edifício (Lisboa, 2015).
- 5 Centro de Artes Visuais, Pátio da Inquisição, Coimbra (Portugal, 2003). Premio Municipal de Arquitectura Diogo de Castilho, edición 2003, Coimbra; Primeiro Prémio FAD d'Arquitectura i Interiorisme (Barcelona, 2004); Finalista da IV Bienal Iberoamericana de Arquitectura e Engenharia Civil, Lima (Peru, 2004); Nomeado para o European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture – Mies Van Der Rohe Award 2005 (Barcelona, 2005).
 - 6 Remodelación do Laboratório Químico, Museu das Ciências, Coimbra (Portugal, 2006). Mención de Honor da Associação Portuguesa de Museus (Portugal, 2007); Micheletti Award 2008, Museo europeo de ciencia, técnica e industria, European Museum Forum (Dublin, 2008); IV Premio de Arquitectura Enor Portugal 2009 (ex-aequo) (Vigo, 2009); Prémio Municipal de Arquitectura “Diogo de Castilho”, edición 2007, Coimbra.
 - 7 Xardín Botánico en Coimbra, proxecto en construción. Concurso público de concepción para a elaboración do Proxecto de Rehabilitación das Estufas Tropicais e Espazo “Ciência In Situ” do JardimBotânico da Universidade de Coimbra, 2014.
 - 8 Entre os anos 1991 e 1998, Mendes Ribeiro foi assistente do Prof. Arquitecto Fernando Távora na materia Projecto IV en el Departamento de Arquitectura na Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia da Universidade de Coimbra.
 - 9 Realizado por João Mendes Ribeiro e Menos é Mais (Cristina Guedes y Francisco Vieira de Campos). Archipelago. Centro de Artes Contemporáneas em Ribeira Grande (Portugal, 2014). Nomeado para o European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture – Mies van der Rohe Award 2015 e para os Prémios Construir 2015 na categoria Mellor Proxecto Público (Lisboa, 2015).

Procedencia das imaxes

- Fig. 1. Rodrigo César, autor.
 Fig. 2. João Mendes Ribeiro, autor.
 Fig. 3. Dcha. João Tuna, autor. Izq. Do mal o menos, Eduardo Nascimento e João Fôja, autores.
 Fig. 4. Sérgio Mah, autor.
 Fig. 5. Do mal o menos, Eduardo Nascimento e João Fôja, autor.
 Fig. 6. Rui Soares, autor.

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Architecture Prize in Madeira 2015 (Oporto, 2015); selected for the FAD Architecture and Interior Design Awards (Barcelona, 2015); nominated for the Construir Awards in the Best Tourism Project category (Lisbon, 2014); mention of honour at the IHRU 2015 Awards (Institute of Housing and Urban Renovation, in the Building Renovation section (Lisbon, 2015).

- 5 *Centre for Visual Arts, Pátio da Inquisição, Coimbra (Portugal, 2003). Diogo de Castilho Municipal Architecture Award, 2003 edition, Coimbra; First prize, FAD Architecture and Interior Design Awards (Barcelona, 2004); finalist at the IV Ibero-American Biennial of Architecture and Civil Engineering, Lima (Peru, 2004); nominated for the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture – Mies Van Der Rohe Award 2005 (Barcelona, 2005).*
- 6 *Remodelling of the Chemistry Laboratory, Museum of Science, Coimbra (Portugal, 2006). Honourable mention from the Portuguese Museum Association (Portugal, 2007); Micheletti Award 2008, European museum of science, technology and industry, European Museum Forum (Dublin, 2008); IV Enor Portugal Architecture Award 2009 (ex-aequo) (Vigo, 2009); Diogo de Castilho Municipal Architecture Award, 2007 edition, Coimbra.*
- 7 *Botanical garden in Coimbra, currently under construction. Public competition for the design and construction of the renovation project for the tropical heaters in the “Science On Site” area in the botanical gardens of the University of Coimbra, 2014 .*
- 8 *Between 1991 and 1998, Mendes Ribeiro was the assistant of the Professor of Architecture, Fernando Távora on the Project IV course at the Department of Architecture in the Faculty of Science and Technology at the University of Coimbra.*
- 9 *Designed by João Mendes Ribeiro and Menos é Mais (Cristina Guedes & Francisco Vieira de Campos). Archipelago. Centre for Contemporary Art in Ribeira Grande (Portugal, 2014). Nominated for the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture – Mies van der Rohe Award 2015 and for the Construir 2015 Awards in the Best Public Project category (Lisbon, 2015).*

Image sources

- Fig. 1. Rodrigo César, author.
 Fig. 2. João Mendes Ribeiro, author.
 Fig. 3. Right: João Tuna, author. Left: Do mal o menos, Eduardo Nascimento and João Fôja, authors.
 Fig. 4. Sérgio Mah, author.
 Fig. 5. Do mal o menos, Eduardo Nascimento and João Fôja, author.
 Fig. 6. Rui Soares, author.

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