

Modernity, Frontiers and Revolutions

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Proportion Harmony Measures



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CRC Press/Balkema is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Typeset by V Publishing Solutions Pvt Ltd., Chennai, India

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Published by: CRC Press/Balkema
Schipholweg 107C, 2316 XC Leiden, The Netherlands
e-mail: Pub.NL@taylorandfrancis.com
www.crcpress.com – www.taylorandfrancis.com

ISBN: 978-0-367-02397-3 (Hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-429-39983-1 (eBook)

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A perspective on the Portuguese identity: The idea of modernity in A Exposição do Mundo Português and Expo'98

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ABSTRACT: This article will focus itself on *A Exposição do Mundo Português* (The Exhibition of the Portuguese World, 1940), and Expo'98 (1998), which were held in Lisbon in opposed political conditions: a right-wing dictatorship and a democracy.

Both of the exhibitions were supposed to show Portugal as a modern country at different times while relying on the tradition of many of their major characteristics.

Accepting the hypothesis, which considers that the relation and balance between Tradition and Modernity is a significant feature in Portuguese architecture, we aim to find out if those two Exhibitions can be seen as similar faces of the Portuguese architectural thinking.

Without neglecting the differences between the two exhibitions, the developed arguments explore the undeniable convergences. Accordingly, the conclusion shows that it may be possible to stress this fundamental idea: rationality, as well as the adaptation to the available means and circumstances present throughout Portuguese architecture history may also support the closeness of the two events. Indeed, *A Exposição do Mundo Português* and Expo'98 may be closer than the distance that separates a dictatorship from a democracy suggests. In sum, the two exhibitions may be seen as an expression of some essential Portuguese identity traits.

Keywords: Tradition and modernity, A Exposição do Mundo Português, Expo'98, Lisboa, Portuguese city

1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of modernity can be understood in two opposite ways. According to José Miguel Rodrigues (2017: 347), being modern can express an update of an already consolidated and acquired knowledge: the path along tradition. On the opposite, the modernity can be seen as a break with the past. This is the avant-garde path. According to this second alternative and idea of architecture in a broad sense, the buildings may either assume all the possible shapes or have a form that does not resemble architecture at all. By this assumption, architecture should follow ideas provided by other fields of knowledge and practice areas, i.e., inter-disciplinarity (Rodrigues, 2017: 347).

In this case, the architecture form may derive from either a concept or an autonomous idea, and, as a consequence, not be committed with the discipline itself, its history, and past (Rodrigues, 2017: 347).

This introduction is relevant to make this article understandable. How can two events, which took place 58 years apart, within entirely different political regimes—a right-wing dictatorship (1926–1974) and a consolidated democratic system—be

united under the same concept of modernity? As it was aforementioned, this article will focus on *A Exposição do Mundo Português* (The Exhibition of the Portuguese World), which was inaugurated in 1940¹ by the *Estado Novo*, and the Expo'98 – Lisbon International Exhibition of 1998, which was organised 24 years after the establishment of a democratic regime in Portugal. It is believed that it may be possible to find a common birth to both, although this idea may seem surprising.

Augusto Castro, commissioner-general of *A Exposição do Mundo Português*, stated at the inauguration that the goal defined to the Exhibition was set out as a projection of the past and heroic images of the national foundation on the creative present, seeking for inspiration for the future.²

The Expo'98 was aimed at reaffirming a national vocation and realigning the country with the new

1. It opened on June 23 and closed on December 2.

2. Cf. Biblioteca de Arte – Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian. *Exposição do Mundo Português, Lisboa, 1940 – Inauguração*. Available at: <http://mundopt40.omeka.net/exhibits/show/exposicaomundoportugues/origem/inauguracao>. (Accessed: 25 February 2018).

The texts presented in Proportion Harmonies and Identities (PHI) - MODERNITY, FRONTIERS AND REVOLUTIONS were compiled with the intent to establish a multidisciplinary platform for the presentation, interaction and dissemination of research. It also aims to foster awareness of and discussion on the topics of Harmony and Proportion with a focus on different visions relevant to Architecture, Arts and Humanities, Design, Engineering, Social and Natural Sciences, and their importance and benefits for the sense of both individual and community identity. The idea of modernity has been a significant driver of development since the Western Early Modern Age. Its theoretical and practical foundations have become the working tools of scientists, philosophers, and artists, who seek strategies and policies to accelerate the development process in different contexts.

PHI (Book Series)

ISSN Print: 2161-3907

Series editors: Mário S. Ming Kong & Maria do Rosário Monteiro



FACULDADE DE ARQUITETURA
UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA



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CRC Press
Taylor & Francis Group
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www.crcpress.com

6500 Broken Sound Parkway, NW
Suite 1300, Boca Raton, FL 33487
Schuylerweg 100
2116 AC Leidsch, NL
2 Park Square, Milton Park
Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN, UK

ISBN 978-0-367-02397-3



9 780367 023973

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