

Carlos Machado e Moura Luiz Cunha, “international but brief” [and pop!] The first years (1957–1973): Churches, Cities, Comics and Capsules



1. Introduction

Luiz Cunha (1933-2019) is recognised for his singular and eclectic architecture, which stands out in the Portuguese context, as well as his production as a highly skilled draughtsman and a passionate painter. His extensive body of work, mostly commissioned by the Church, has received a certain attention and research (Almeida, 2006; Figueira, 2014; Milheiro, 2011; Miranda, 2012) and his production is read as part of a movement for the renovation of religious architecture (A. Cunha, 2015; Marques, 2017), as an individual expression in parallel/contrast with authors of his generation (Serpa, 1987), or as part of a fantasist trend towards postmodern Portuguese architecture, alongside with Manuel Vicente, Tomás Taveira, Pancho Guedes and others (Serpa, 1983; Figueira, 2014). Understandably, these studies devote more attention to the built work than the writings, drawings, unbuilt projects and unbuildable paper architectures. However, an analysis of that lesser known corpus reveals an interesting, surprising production, especially in the early years of his career; he was an attentive spectator of international debate and, more importantly, a translator of some of these ideas into Portuguese reality.

Based on graphical documentation – mostly held in the archives of ISCTE, in Lisbon, and published in magazines, the writings on (and by) Cunha, and a long personal conversation, this article proposes a rereading of Cunha's activity, focusing on his exploration of pop expression through: a) drawing – merging the aesthetics and the mechanics of comics and cartoon into architectural representation; b) buildings – employing a formal techno-pop repertoire and experimenting with complex structures, always with a distinct sense of humour; and c) architectural discourse – entering the international debate on megastructures and capsules of the time, while actively promoting Portuguese architecture. Analysed chronologically, this production allows a retracing of the evolution of Cunha's thinking and reveals a figure who is “international but brief” – in Nuno Portas' expression (2012: p. 12) – constantly halfway between regional architecture and space-age capsules.

2. Family, Formation, Fantasy

Cunha inherited his ability for draughtsmanship and passion for art from his father, the painter Luiz de Carvalho e Cunha, manager of the typography *Imprensa Portuguesa* in Porto and also a cartoonist for *O Primeiro de Janeiro* and *Sempre Fixe*, signing his comics under the pseudonym D. Fuas. Ink and paper leftovers were always available for young Luiz to practise and he rapidly acquired great pleasure in drawing and was an avid comic reader, especially of Jesus Blasco's *Cuto*. Yet suddenly, his father completely “ceased his activity as a cartoonist because he thought [his nine year-old son] should not follow his steps” and ought to develop his abilities under “a freer, uninfluenced formation” (Cunha, 2015). Still, Cunha's drawings, paintings and

Frontispiece “Prumo Tower – Aspects of the project” (comic strip).
(source: *Arquitectura*, 124, May 1972)

buildings testify to “a work of wisdom, dressed with apparent naivety (...) as a superior sense of humour” carrying perhaps “the lesson of D. Fuas’ caricatures” (Pomar, 2012: p. 144).

Influenced by his father’s friend, the architect António Júlio Teixeira Lopes, Cunha studied architecture at the Porto Fine Arts School (ESBAP) during the 1950s. In this period, students were suddenly offered unprecedented access to information (Siza, 2012: p. 14), through the boom of architectural magazines and the stimulation of school director Carlos Ramos and his team, including Fernando Távora (who attended CIAM [International Congresses of Modern Architecture]). Very early, Cunha became a fierce *Corbusian*, but also permeable to James Stirling, Franco Albini or Mario Ridolfi, cultivating these references fearlessly and often literally. Being among the most rigorous and better-classified students (Siza, 2012: p. 14), he worked at home, while pursuing intense fantastic artistic activity, painting and assembling surrealist sculptures and collages that surprised Álvaro Siza, Diogo Lino Pimentel and other colleagues who visited him. In contrast with his discreet and controlled mood, totems and disturbing figures made of different materials seem borrowed directly from science-fiction and pop culture – from robots to the Beatles (Fig. 1) – in the lexicon of the Independent Group.

3. Drawing as a form of humour and communication

Indeed, painting and art were fundamental to Cunha’s work, providing the plastic matrix for his architecture (Figueira, 2014: p. 224). Although he belongs to a generation of architects for whom drawing is an essential thinking tool, contrary to Porto School tradition, Cunha rarely sketched. His projects were conceived mentally before their forms were translated into drawings with detail and remarkable precision and speed (Cunha, 2015). Drawing allowed “imagining forms in their totality” (Cunha, 1994) and combining many disparate sources, merging archaism and futurism, technology and religion, in a playful collage serving both Cunha’s eclectic pictorial interests and his freestyle approach to architecture.

Robots among ruins, angels with headsets or Christ holding a laptop feature in his drawings, paintings and murals¹ like cartoon-cloud-shaped windows in concrete walls – Parede (Fig. 13) and Nevogilde – or wind towers in a neoclassical compositions with Corinthian capitals made of industrial metal elements – Santuário do Cristo Rei. Drawing was a gateway for his undisciplined genre of different scales, (dis) proportions, materials, and free quotes from the history of architecture in a Dada-pop decontextualization. As Manuel Graça Dias accurately remarks, “the truly striking or personal characteristic of his work will probably be the use, the resource, the survival of humour” (2012, p. 134). His cartoony jest – halfway between Le Corbusier’s purism and comics, but also borrowing from Byzantine art and David Hockney – remains its most vivid expression.



Fig. 1 *Robot II*, 1964. One of Cunha's many three-dimensional collages. Photo: Luiz Cunha, 1965 (source: Miranda, 2012, p. 15)

However, for Cunha, drawing is also a tool for reaching the wider public. Rather than the abstraction of plan and section, he chose perspectives for prefiguring the general ambience of his projects, illustrated with cartoony views with people, cars, birds and letterings (Fig. 10). Furthermore, using the mechanics of comics, which “became a familiar way of telling a story”, Cunha often adopted sequences to explain a project, in the cinematographic manner of Gordon Cullen’s *Townscape*² (Cunha, 2015) (Fig. 2). More remarkable, however – and persistent throughout his career – is Cunha’s transposition of the kaleidoscopic vision of comics into technical drawings. Entirely hand-drawn, Cunha’s simultaneous juxtaposition of plans, sections,

perspective details and descriptive captions on a sheet of paper transforms the drawing into a storyboard, visually narrating the project, its materiality and way of building in a graphic, legible way (Figs. 3, 14). The combination of “a certain artisticity” with a focus “on detail and attention with constructive systems” is perhaps what links Cunha’s exuberant and eccentric work to his training in the Porto School (Milheiro, 2011).

4. The first churches and the revision of modern architecture

Cunha’s first buildings were churches. By the time he graduated in 1957, after training with his teacher José Carlos Loureiro, and entered the Urban Planning department in Porto Municipality, Cunha was already profoundly engaged in religious architecture and took part in MRAR (Movement for Renovation of Religious Art,³ 1952–67), actively participating in its North section. Somehow, European post-war architectural debate was surprisingly in tune with the process of liturgical revision of the 1940s and 1950s. A will to renovate around ideas of “community”, “society”, “core” and “the heart of the city” was simultaneously on the table at CIAM’s last meetings under an urban perspective, and Christian culture under a religious one (Marques, 2017: pp. 231–244). Therefore, churches became an essential element within the process of modern architecture revision, later followed

Fig. 2 *Urbanization Project for the Avenida D. Afonso Henriques, 1964.*

Slide presentation depicting sequential views between Praça da Liberdade and the Luiz I Bridge from the car (left) and the pedestrian (right). (source: courtesy Alexandre Alves Costa)

Fig. 3 *Cristo-Rei Church in Portela de Sacavém, Loures, 1983 (construction details).* Cunha merges sections, details, axonometric perspectives and annotations in the same sheet of paper. (source: *Jornal Arquitectos*, 128, October 1993, p. 59)



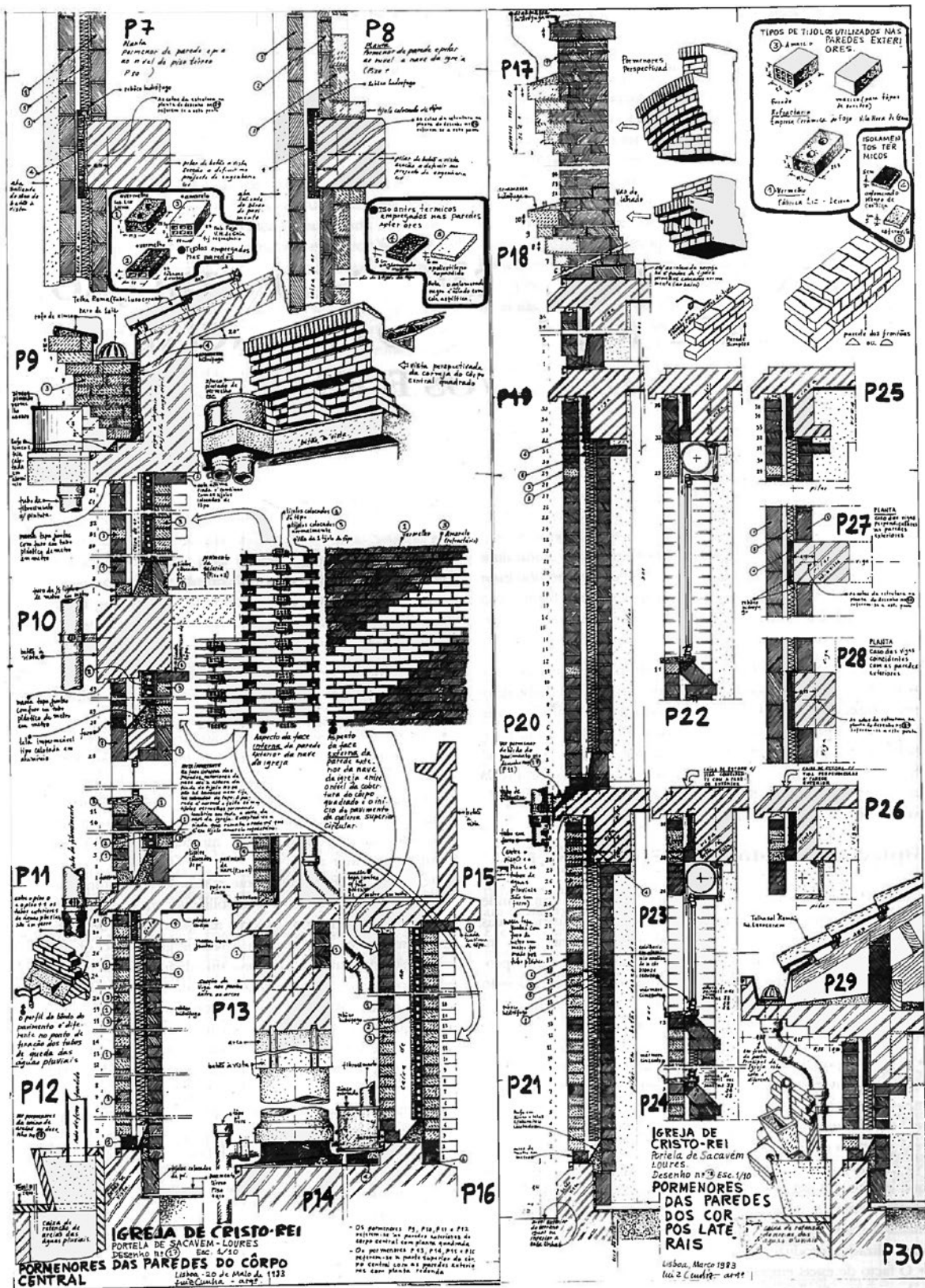
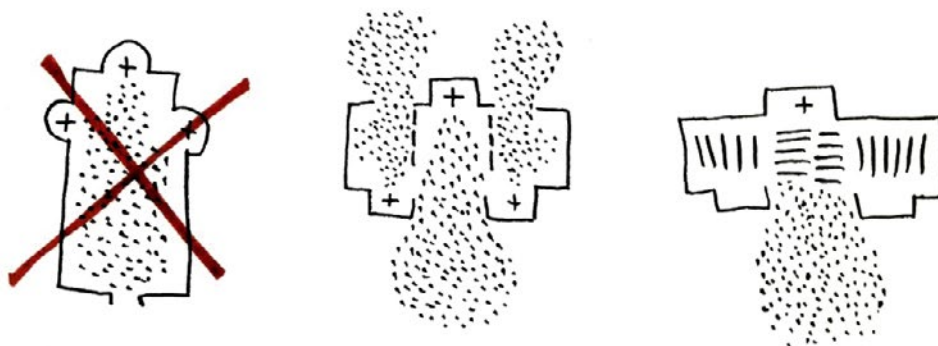
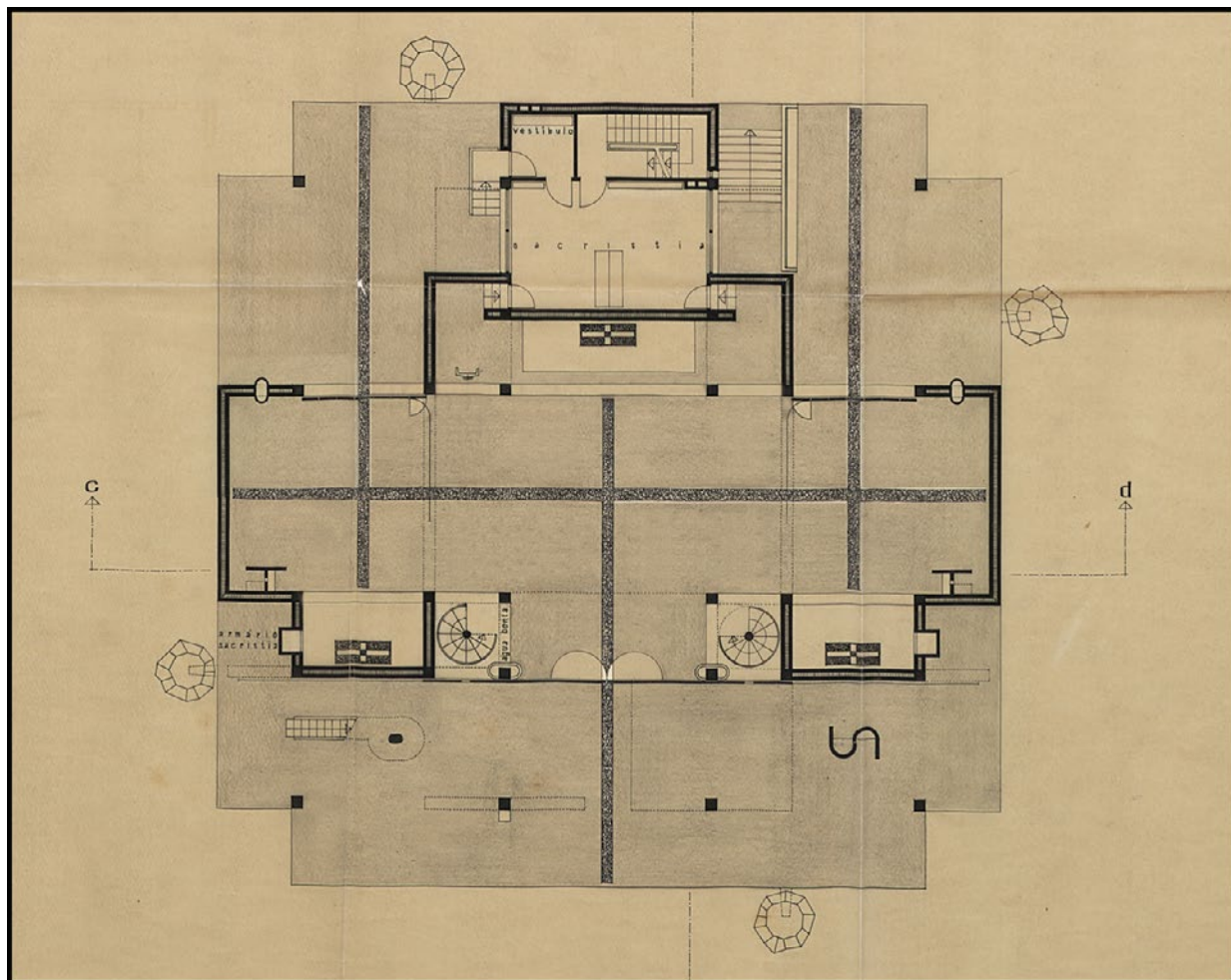


Fig. 4 Church of Our Lady of Mercy,
Loulé (plan and sketched diagrams).
Diploma project (CODA) at ESBAP, 1957.
(source: Centro de Documentação da FAUP,
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by schools and social housing (Pimentel, Portas & Cunha, 2012: p. 50). Cunha's generation explored the plural tendencies of modern architecture, channelling that renovation to the church, with pivotal examples like the Sagrado Coração de Jesus church in Lisbon in 1961-70, by Nuno Teotónio Pereira and Nuno Portas – an innovative urban integration, articulated around an inner churchyard – or some of Cunha's early projects.



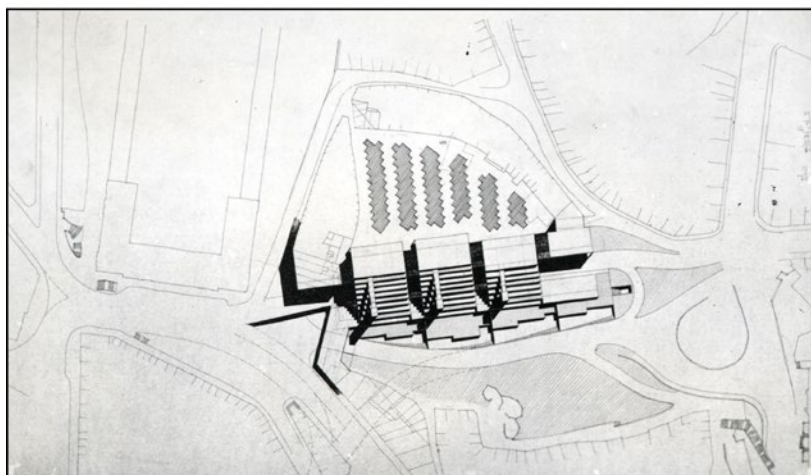
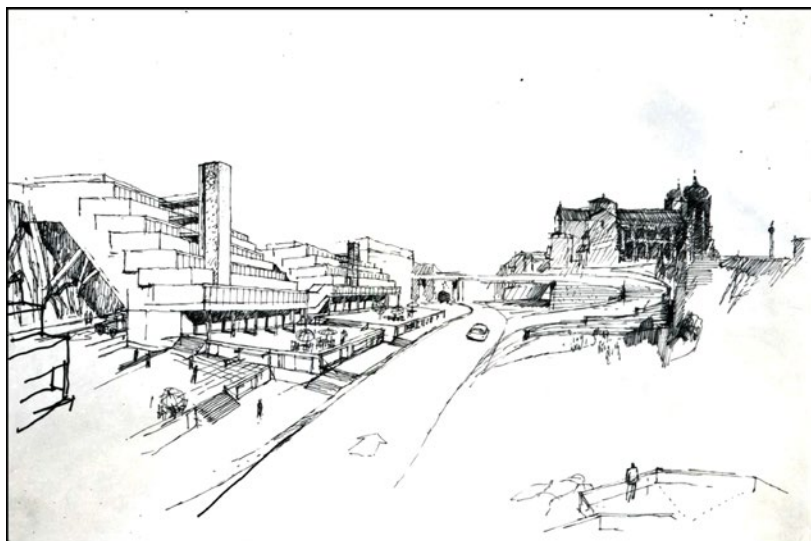
Indeed, his competition entry for a Church in Loulé (Fig. 4) – which he presented as his final degree thesis together with a book on Religious Modern Architecture (Cunha, 1957b) – and his first built churches, São Mamede de Negrelos in 1959–65, the Chapel of the Dominican Convent of Fátima in 1962–65 or Our Lady of Fátima in Póvoa do Valado in 1964–68, all explore a progressive transition between interior and exterior. Although formally very different, their ambiguous spaces and pavement continuities recall themes of Mediterranean architecture that the International Style obliterated (Pimentel, Portas & Cunha, 2012: p. 53), and were intensely discussed at MRAR. Loulé's extended eaves, expanding the building to the exterior (Cunha, 1957a: p. 9), even preclude something Cunha further developed in Brasília (Fig. 6) and Pittsburgh (Fig. 7), in a different key.

These projects also demonstrate Cunha's critique of the modern lexicon, from the Romanesque of Negrelos to the brutalism of Fátima. This is also legible in the Porto French School in 1959–68, commissioned by the French Consulate to three young architects working in the Porto Municipality under French urban planner Robert Auzelle's team: Manuel Marques de Aguiar (1927–2015⁴), Carlos Carvalho Dias (b. 1929) and Cunha. Its pavilions were articulated in an irregular geometry in "subordination to the topography and the existing trees" (Descriptive memory, process 444/61: pp. 3–9), combining stone and concrete, testifying the commitment with building traditions, under the influence of the *Survey for Popular Architecture* (Arquitectura Popular em Portugal, 1961), in which Carvalho Dias took part.

5. Between cities and canopies

Cunha and Carvalho Dias met Auzelle (1913–1983) in 1955, while studying on an intensive course in urbanism he directed at ESBAP. In 1956, Auzelle returned to direct Porto's Masterplan and invited his former students to join his team. The recently graduated Cunha had left his place as João Andersen's assistant at ESBAP to work at the Municipal Urbanization Office between 1957 and 1966. Cunha's drawing abilities were put to good use, illustrating Auzelle's book *Plaidoyer pour une Organisation Consciente de l'Espace* (1962), articles for international magazines⁵ and, especially, a series of projects for the city. With cartoony perspectives, Cunha communicated the interventions, setting their atmosphere, while his Townscape-like sequences depicted the human-eye vision in slide presentations (Cunha, 1963)(Fig. 2). The projects designed by Cunha during his tenure at Porto Municipality – Jardim do Ouro, Trindade, Urbanization of Avenida D. Afonso Henriques (Fig. 5) or Passeio das Virtudes – also reveal an integrated focus between architecture, urban design and urban planning. Although Cunha later concentrated on buildings, leaving urbanism behind, a considerable part of his career devoted great attention to these intermediate scales on which Team 10 members were precisely operating⁶.

Fig. 5 *Urbanization of Avenida D. Afonso Henriques, c. 1966. Preliminary megastructural solution, perspective and plan.*
(source: Arquivo Histórico do Porto, F.NP: CMP/7/778)



One of the projects conceived in this perspective – and, albeit unbuilt, arguably one of the most relevant in Cunha's career – is the preliminary project for the Portuguese Embassy in Brasília, the new Brazilian capital then under construction. In 1961, Carlos Ramos invited the 28-year-old Luiz Cunha, to join him designing the building, working with full freedom and autonomy (Cunha, 2006: p. 119). Their radical project consisted of a large canopy floating over different regular volumes for the services (Fig. 6). Ambiguously placed between architecture and urban design, the canopy functions as an open greenhouse, a sun protection device for the gardens on the volumes' flat roofs. This radical project for its time, which recalls some of the later megastructural propositions of the 1960s, contrasted with the neoclassical "Português Suave" architecture of the Rio de Janeiro Embassy, completed shortly before in 1950–61 by Rebello de Andrade. However, despite the compliments awarded to the project by Niemeyer

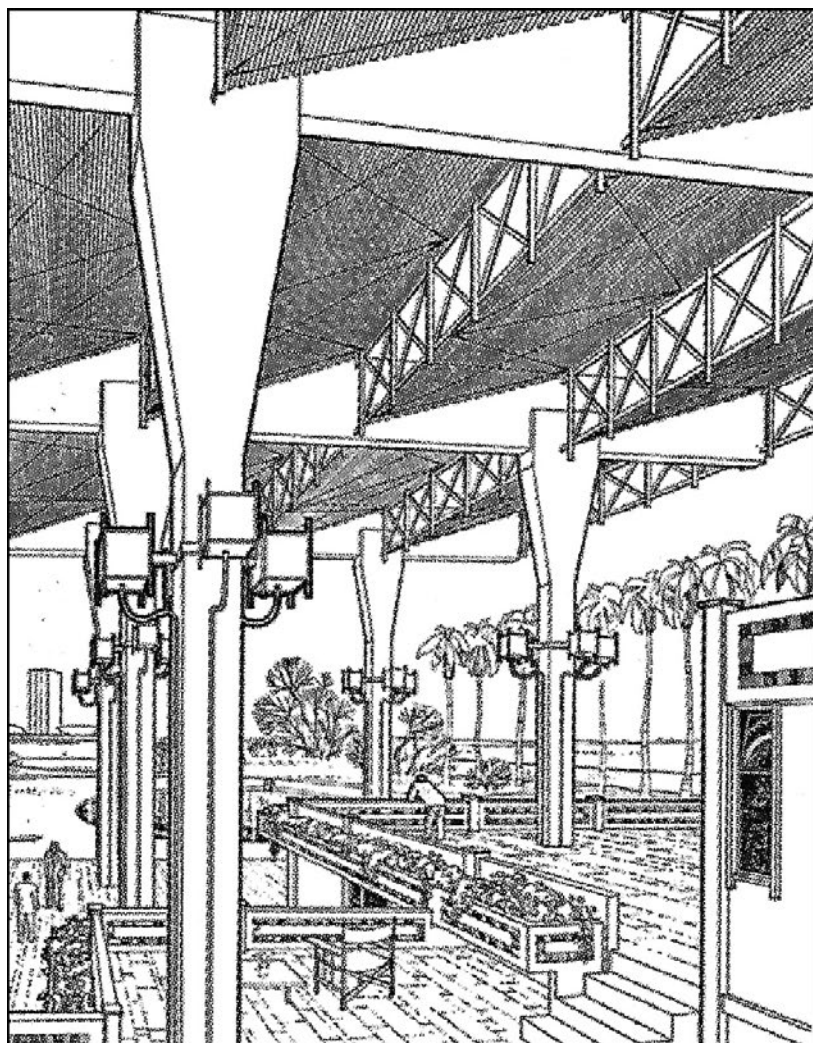


Fig. 6 Portuguese Embassy in Brasília, by Carlos Ramos and Luiz Cunha, 1961 (perspective [source: Luiz Cunha Archive, ISCTE-IUL; Miranda, 2012]; and model [Carlos Ramos Archive, property of the family; Matos, Ramos, 2007, p. 97])

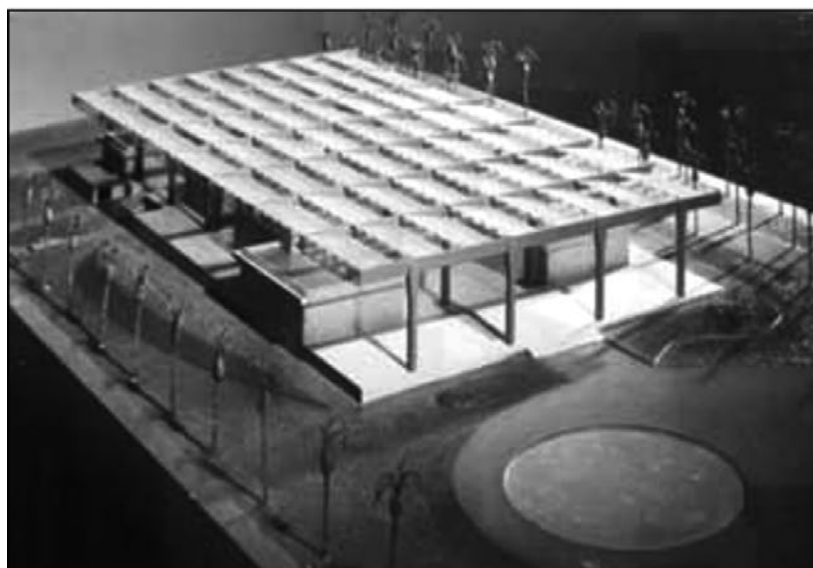
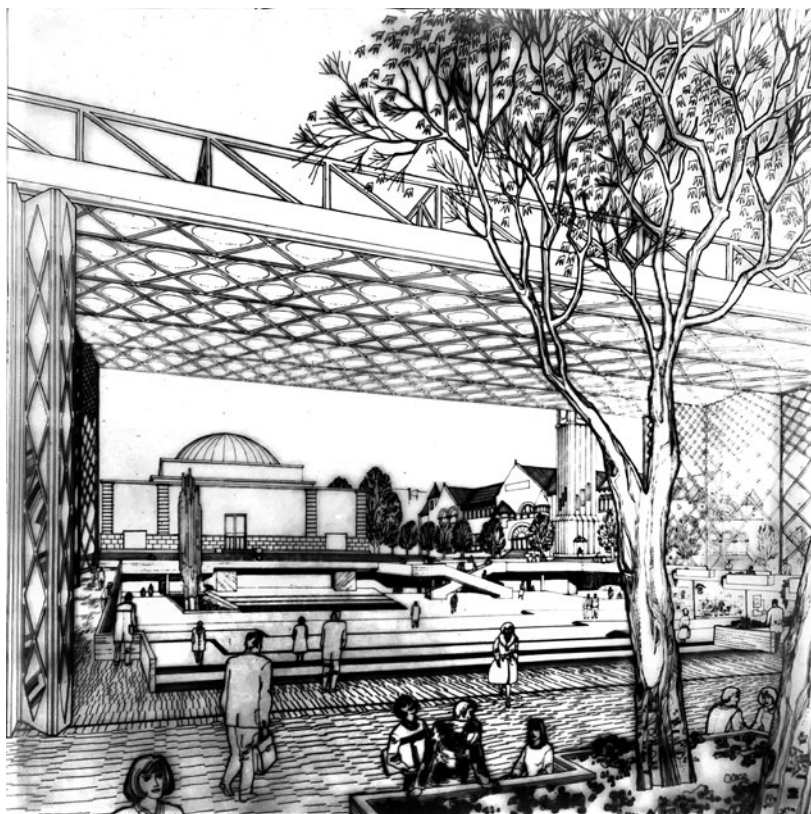


Fig. 7 Competition entry for a square in Pittsburgh, by Cunha and Carvalho Dias, 1963 (perspective) (Luiz Cunha Archive, ISCTE-IUL).



and Lucio Costa in 1962 (letter to C. Ramos, as quoted in Matos, Ramos, 2007: p. 98), and Portuguese Minister of Public Works Arantes Oliveira, the project was allegedly refused for its “analytic constructivism which (...) [rendered the building] too uncharacteristic” (Descriptive Memory, as quoted in Coutinho, 2001), presumably due to Salazar’s interference (Cunha, 2006: p. 119; Pimentel, Portas & Cunha, 2012: pp. 67–68), being replaced much later by Chorão Ramalho’s version, built in 1972–76.

However, the idea of exploring larger (mega-)structures harbouring different uses or volumes underneath remained vivid in Cunha’s mind and was later revisited. Firstly in Cunha and Carvalho Dias’ joint entry for the 1963 international competition for Allegheny Public Square in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with a glass and aluminium sliding canopy that covered a multi-level square – similar to some Jaap Bakema designs and the Smithsons – during the long harsh winter (Cunha, C. Dias, 1965). Or in Cunha’s entry for the Iranian National Library competition in Tehran in 1977, a floating suspended structure resonating with Archigram or Yona Friedman’s architectures.

6. Metropolis and the taste of megastructures

In the early 1960s, Cunha subscribed to *Architectural Design* (AD) and regularly ordered new books, keeping up-to-date with international

debate. Simultaneously, he started publishing projects and articles in Portuguese magazines *Binário* (Cunha, 1960) and *Arquitectura* (Cunha, 1961). In the lengthy “Meditation on the Metropolis of Tomorrow” (Cunha, 1962), Cunha reflects on large metropolises and reviews several international projects.⁷ Given the chaos of a large metropolis and the inefficiency of partial interventions and planning procedures to counter the unregulated growth of suburbs, Cunha argues that “the dimension of the problems” and the evolution of modern life “is incompatible with old structures” and “solutions of continuity with the old city” (1962: p. 5). Perhaps echoing Auzelle’s infrastructural perspectives of modernisation for Porto, Cunha blames “large infrastructural works in Europe” for causing “problems in connection with old arteries”, while regretting that Le Corbusier’s 1920s projects were dismissed simply for being “distant towards conventional conceptions” (p. 7).

The article features many large-scale “visionary” projects designed in 1958–61: the Smithsons’ Hauptstadt Berlin, Ludovico Quaroni’s Barene di S. Giuliano in Venice-Mestre, Kenzo Tange’s bays of Boston and Tokyo, Akui and Nozawa’s *Neo-mastaba*, and many others. Despite their constraints, Cunha stresses the “concern of unity” of these schemes, and praises common aspects of density (rendering the construction profitable and avoiding territorial expansion), linear development (mitigating segregation and incorporating infrastructures) and liberation of ground (allowing for a redistribution of property). Yet he overtly dismisses some schemes, like Tange’s, Venturelli’s *Urbanistica Spaziale* and others on the grounds of misleading or actually worsening present conditions.

Cunha summarises that “no major work (...) should be undertaken before meeting the means for communities to dispose of the land to carry out major collective tasks of renovation”. Thinking as a planner, he calls for “economists and legalists to find just and equitable means”. Yet he concludes in an optimistic key, stating that despite the “insipidity of present studies” one can “expect more mature and complete solutions” in the future. Cunha believed “a ‘different’ Man is gradually emerging” and “traditional mentality” could be overcome, that society might “accept that man can live happily on a high floor several dozen metres above the ground” (Cunha, 1962: p. 9) and “real communities [can be] organized and integrated into the future urban complex” (Cunha, 1962: p. 10).

7. Between “authentic architecture” and space-age capsules and megastructures

Cunha’s attention to international publications allowed him to keep track of new trends but also promote the dissemination of Portuguese architecture. Indeed, in 1964, he wrote a chapter about Portugal for *World Architecture One*, the first of three volumes edited by British photographer and long-time AR collaborator John Donat (1933–2004) aiming to provide a critical review of present-day architecture in around

thirty countries. Pancho Guedes, who contributed for Mozambique, told Donat about Távora and Siza (Milheiro, 2007) and Cunha's article "The search for an Authentic Architecture" (Cunha, 1964) focused precisely on Porto and the North,⁸ particularly the work of Januário Godinho,⁹ Viana de Lima, Távora and Siza. Cunha refers to Távora and Viana's experience at CIAM and the four authors' focus on the "integration of the buildings with the environment", "the new interest in social aspects" and, especially, a "renewed interest in popular architecture", something that rendered the new generation "conscious of the artificiality of those architects who used structural techniques and technical processes which were too far advanced for (...) the traditional building industry, and preferred instead to rationalize traditional techniques" (Cunha, 1964: p. 86).

This awareness towards traditional building techniques was utterly reinforced by two of the many trips Cunha made during his tenure in the municipality, which were pivotal in changing his perception and later approach to architecture, as he realized "that there was indeed another root that we were not contemplating in modern architecture" (Cunha, 1994). One was to Southern Angola with Carvalho Dias to present the work of urbanism at Porto Council at the "I National Colloquium of Municipalities" in October 1963 (C. Dias, 2012: 28), and the second to the Azores, replacing Nuno Portas in a workshop in September 1965, which would be a sort of revelation:

"(...) this trip to Azores would profoundly change my life. On the one hand, it put me in contact with an architecture and a historical situation that was already considered past here on the mainland. And at that time it was in full clarity. I opened a world, which I thought it was already lost. (...) And what my colleagues considered an unforeseen originality, it actually stemmed from these trips" (Cunha in Pimentel, Portas & Cunha, 2012: p. 56).

Yet the change would not be immediate. Cunha kept cultivating his fascination for megastructures and capsules, becoming an enthusiast of Archigram's techno-futurist work, which had featured prominently in AD since the mid-1960s. He purchased the group's eponymous magazine and sent Peter Cook drawings of megastructures and cellular projects. One of these, a detailed perspective of a cellular building system with extensible tube-like galleries connecting the capsules directly to the ground, ended up in the pages of *Archigram* 7, in a collage titled "Conversations" alongside with projects by AA students, revealing an "overlap that is beginning to imply an international language of machined parts with megastructures, variable access" (Archigram, 1966). One year later, Archigram featured on the cover of *Arquitectura* yet although some Portuguese architects – like Conceição Silva (Barata, 2000) or Marcelo Costa¹⁰ – explored the group's ideas or became close to Peter Cook – like Pancho Guedes in the mid-1970s

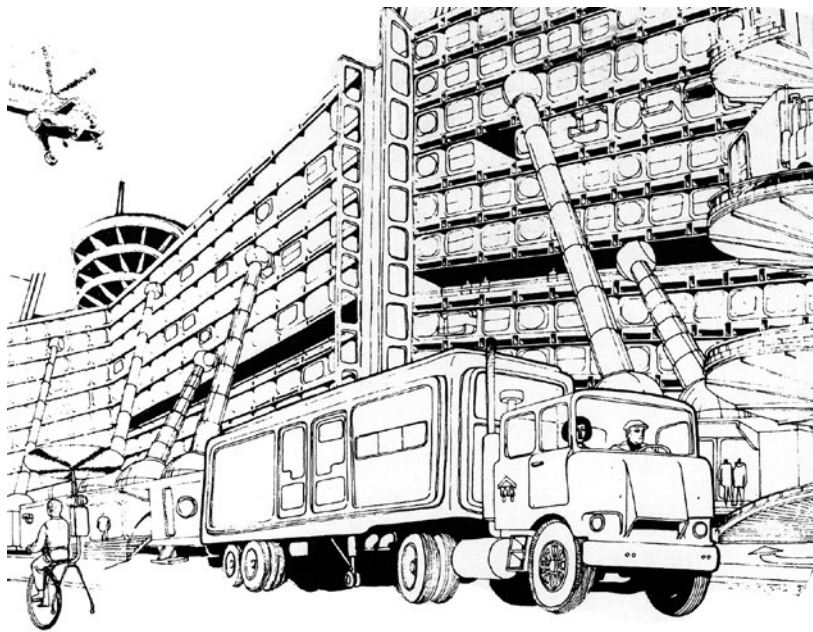


Fig. 8 Capsule-building with extensible telescopic connections (perspective). (source: Archigram 7, 1966; courtesy Luiz Cunha)

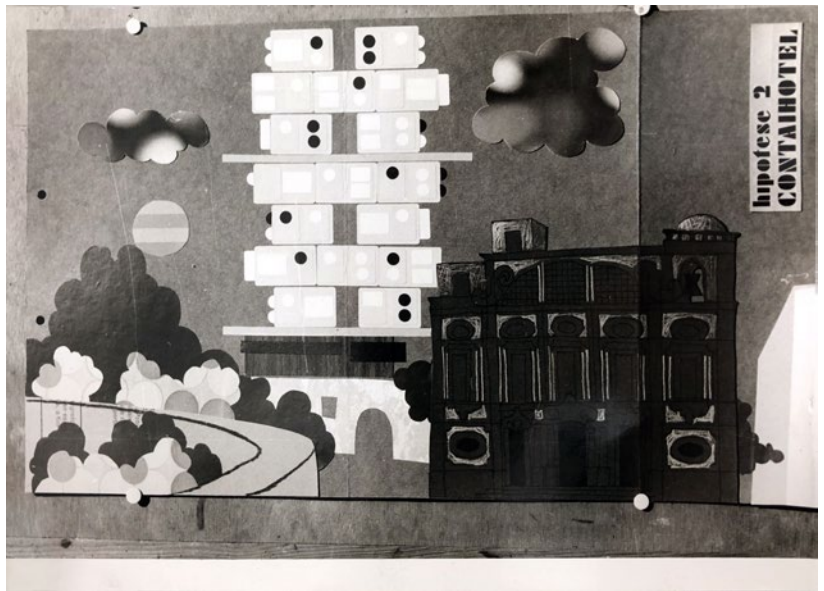
– no other Portuguese author (or Iberian, for that matter) had his work published in *Archigram*.

Also, realizing in his first visits to the Azores, that “there were no highways in S. Miguel, and it was extremely difficult to make the connections between the different localities”, so that “the populations barely knew each other from the two sides of the island” (Cunha, 2015) Cunha came up with an unconventional solution to foster tourism, a topic then entering the public debate. He envisioned installing cellular hotels around the island, made of modular containers easily to plug-in and transport by boat – much like a smaller version of Plug-in City. These *Contaihotel* structures could be installed in many different places, from the vicinities of Church of Colégio in Ponta Delgada to remote locations only accessible by sea as depicted in Cunha’s unconventional collages, which borrow Archigram’s two-dimensional visuals with *Yellow Submarine*-like clouds (Fig. 9).

8. Rethinking megastructures and cellular architecture

This vivid interest in capsules and futuristic architecture took Cunha to the European Cultural Foundation congress, “Citizen & City in the Year 2000”, in Rotterdam in May 1970, after a stop in London to visit some buildings, mostly by Stirling. The Congress “proposed a meditation on the problems of urban development” from a long-term perspective (Cunha, 1970c: p. 262) and Cunha brought “Some Thoughts on Urban Megastructures and Cellular Architecture” (1970a). Yet, unlike the 1962 article, Cunha this time overtly criticises megastructures for having “no relation to existing cities and traditional urban structures” and cellular

Fig. 9 Contaihotel project installed in Ponta Delgada, 196X–73 (collage).
(source: Luiz Cunha Archive, ISCTE-IUL).



architecture for its “almost exclusively functional point of view”, based on “the automobile and aircraft industry [that] tacitly disregards current techniques” (1970a: p. 137) – arguments that somehow echo his thoughts on Portuguese architecture. Furthermore, Cunha argues that current megastructures are obstacles to diversity and constraints in the form of dwellings, as “the megastructural principle (...) does not seem apt to correspond to the variety of tastes, requirements and situations characteristic of a true community of human beings”. Therefore, he calls for different models, open to a variety of systems and providing “a wider measure of liberty than that of choosing a cell in a type of honeycomb” (p. 138), ideally offering users the possibility of building their own cells. While his 1962 concerns on land property remained unanswered, in 1970 the focus lay in the reinvention of traditional urban typologies, echoing Team 10 ideas but also precluding postmodernism: “a great effort must be made to find the means to build the spatial equivalent of streets, squares, and in general of the various open spaces that have proved their value in our old towns” (p. 138). The quality of place had become a more important requirement than the promise of mobility: “Although the social groups aspiring to mobility (...) are tending to increase, (...) the majority of the population seeks to create social stability and a link with defined spaces and characteristics”. Furthermore, “the development of information techniques could help this fixation by doing away in many cases with the need to move” (1970a: p. 138).

The other interventions in the congress focused more on criticising the present-state than long-term prospections. Times had indeed changed and Cunha’s report notes that “the man of today seems to fear the future” and “that all recent urban growth has been pursued

according to (...) predominantly economic-capitalistic criteria (...) neglecting real human interests" (Cunha, 1970c: p. 262). Although "relatively poorly industrialized" Portugal was still immune to "the severity of the problem of the uncontrolled spread of industry", Europe's struggle with pollution and the "saturation of life in great centres" (p. 263) was the new concern, stressed in Victor Gruen's alarming communication and Bakema's insightful remarks, which interested Cunha. Ecological consciousness was entering the architectural discourse, marking a shift from the techno-optimistic 1960s to the more environmentally aware 1970s, and Cunha too was distancing himself from megastructural fever.

9. Comics and (pop) architecture for Lisbon and the Azores

With the conclusion of the Porto Masterplan, Cunha, Carvalho Dias and others had left the municipality in 1966 (C. Dias, 2012: p. 30) and one month later Cunha married Maria de Jesus Medeiros, from Ponta Delgada. From then on, Cunha practised as a freelance architect and moved to Lisbon in 1970. The trips to the Azores became more regular and so did the commissions. At the beginning of the decade, Cunha's work was in full swing, operating in different programmes in free-style, always "starting over, experimenting a new path and sometimes even a new language" even in the same projects (Pimentel, 1972: 9). Many of these buildings featured in the 1972 issue of *Arquitectura* dedicated to his recent work: the *Corbusian* Charity Centre of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, 1962-70; the pictorially expressionist Church of Carvalhido, 1966-72; or the brutalist Nevolgilde Parish Centre, 1968-70 – all three in Porto – and some unbuilt projects like: the Church of Pindêlo in Oliveira de Azeméis, 1969-71 (Fig. 10); the techno-pop Municipal Services of Aveiro, 1971; and the *Prumo* office building in Avenida da República in Lisbon, 1971. Quite remarkably, the issue's cover is a full-page comic strip, explaining *Prumo* tower's curtain wall and cosmopolitan features in a drawing that merges the sequential *Townscape*-like approach with an overtly bold pop attitude (Fig. 11).

In the introduction to these works, Diogo Lino Pimentel remarks that even in the rural and culturally traditionalist context of Pindêlo "it is possible for a proposal of a pioneering programme to be conceived and accepted which Luiz Cunha approaches almost *archigramatically*" (1972: p.10). Besides oval-shape and the *blob* Archigram-like skylights, Pimentel stresses the flexible articulation of the plan, which allows different configurations and uses – somehow echoing Cunha's first churches. He adds: "industrialization, which slowly settles in the region, does not explain everything. The system is encouraging, and the initiative should be encouraged" (p. 10). Similarly, the rural 'unspoiled' nature of the Azores provided open territory for architectural experimentation and irreverently playing with references. Examples are the literal reinterpretation of Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation* for the unbuilt housing of *Urbanização do Carvão* in Ponta Delgada in 1974,

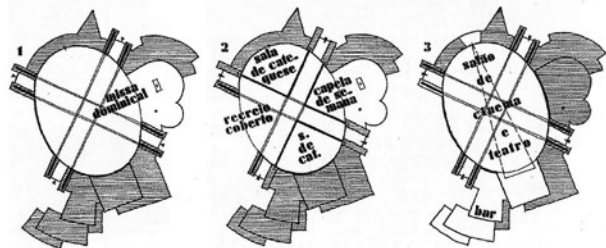


Fig. 10 Church of Pindêlo, Oliveira de Azeméis, 1969–71 (perspective and diagrams).
(source: Luiz Cunha Archive, ISCTE-IUL)



Fig. 11 "Prumo Tower – Aspects of the project" (comic strip).
(source: *Arquitectura*, 124, May 1972) Positive image by the author.

or the more irreverent exploration of La Tourette in the preliminary drawings for the Convent of the Poor Clares in S. Miguel in 1976 – an early version of the Residence for the Sisters Hospitaliers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Parede, Cascais, 1977–81, where Cunha intertwined *Corbusianism* and pop elements in a fragmented architecture with many episodes. Or the techno-pop double concrete façade of the unbuilt Headquarters of the Insular Company of Electricity in Ponta Delgada, in 1972 (Fig. 12), borrowing directly from Anglo-Saxon brutalism, Metabolism and the Archigram repertoires. All these projects reveal an unconventional (*archigramatical*?) approach to the programme but also very strong communicative expressions. The *Prumo* tower or the Insular Company of Electricity were Cunha's attempts at the "iconographic office building, which marked post-modernism in Portugal" (Figueira, 2014: p. 183), following Teotónio Pereira's *Franjinhas* in 1965–69 and Conceição Silva and Taveira's *Castil*, 1968–72.

10. Towards a postmodern megastructure

A decade later, in 1982, *Arquitectura* featured Cunha prominently again, but his work was at a completely different stage. Although futurist and techno-pop projects were still part of his repertoire by the turn of the decade – with the star-shaped space-shuttle-like entry for the Fátima competition in 1977 or an inflatable roof proposal for the Montréal Olympic Stadium in 1981 – Cunha now dwelled on "a revival of forms in traditional architecture" (Cunha, 2006: p. 124) with an exuberant, eclectic historicism. According to Cunha, this change towards the neo-vernacular was the result of a slow, gradual reflection

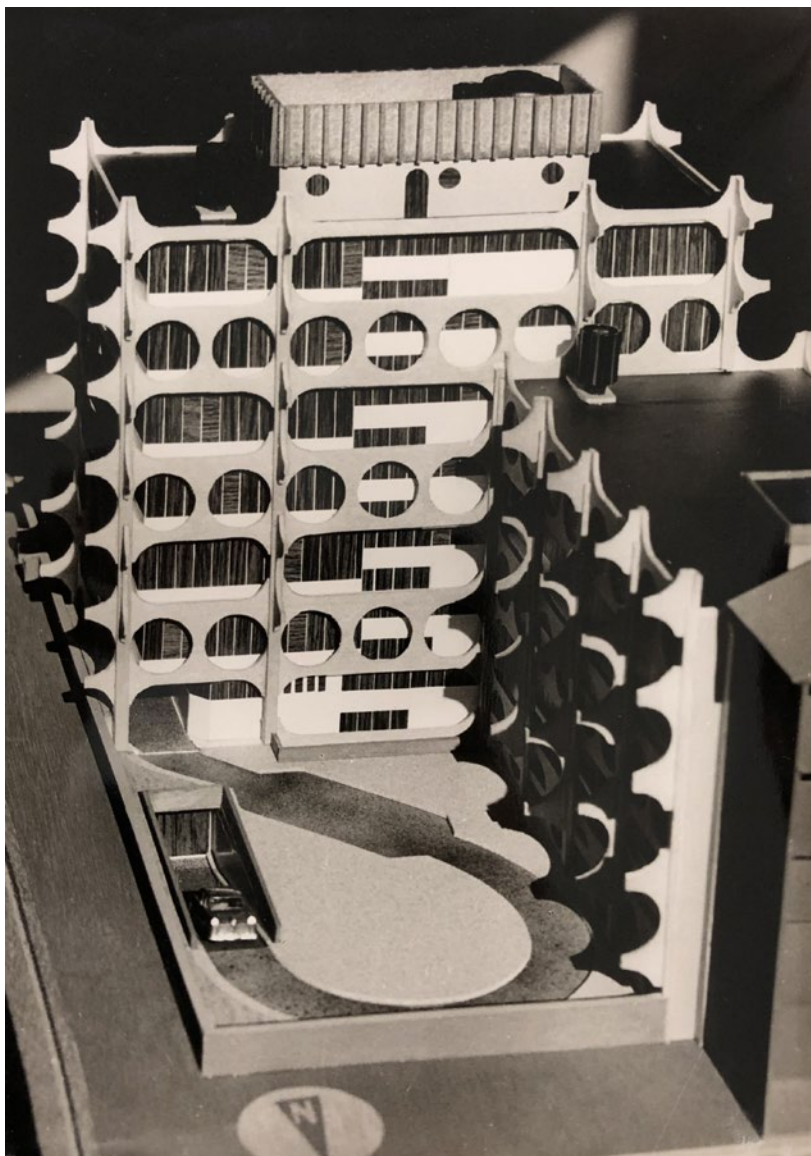


Fig. 12 Headquarters of the Insular Company of Electricity (model).
(source: Luiz Cunha Archive, ISCTE-IUL)

on Portuguese architecture, the *Survey*, the trips to the Azores and Angola (Cunha, 1994), and the growing influence of Raul Lino's work¹¹ as he sought inspiration from Northern Portugal's traditional architecture (Cunha, 2015), and finally his intense exchanges with Léon Krier.¹² Retrospectively, the identification with "postmodernism was a purely fortuitous coincidence, as [his architecture] never had the concern of following what was theoretically identified with postmodernism" (Cunha, 2000: p. 39). Indeed, his undisciplined, ludic, collage-architecture dated from earlier times so his work might be read as postmodern *avant la lettre* (Pimentel, 1982: p. 42; G. Dias, 2012: p. 126) or, in Portas' words, as a "polymorphism (...) used episodically by postmodernisms... international but brief" (Portas, 2012: p. 12).

The formal humour of the “Diário do Minho” newspaper headquarters in Braga, built in 1972-77 – with its overtly decorative cornice, neo-gothic bow-window, prefabricated concrete elements as stonework and visual exploration of lettering – is perhaps the first deliberate step towards neo-vernacular eclecticism. Yet Pimentel identified not one but two different components in coexistence in Cunha’s work, “a *Corbusian* [one] (...) in works with more cosmopolitan programmes and contexts, and another, eclectic, (...) in less erudite programmes and environments” (Pimentel, 1982: p. 42). This oscillation is evident between the Residence for the Sisters Hospitallers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Parede, 1977-81 (Fig. 13), and the Psycho-Geriatric Centre of 1982-85 (Fig. 14), two juxtaposed buildings separated by only five years. Cunha shifts from a playful and exuberant appropriation of Le Corbusier’s late brutalism merged with comic-like clouds and provocative techno-pop elements in the first to a ludic hyperbole of “Portuguese” vernacular architecture in the second. Playfulness and exuberance are the sole invariants.

The emphasis on traditionalism accompanied Luiz Cunha throughout the 1980s and 1990s, yet somehow ingredients of his techno-pop fantasy and taste for megastructures remained vivid in his work. Despite their neo-vernacular language, churches still carry

Fig. 13 Residence for the Sisters Hospitallers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Parede, 1977-81 (photography of the construction).
(source: *Arquitectura*, 145, February 1982)



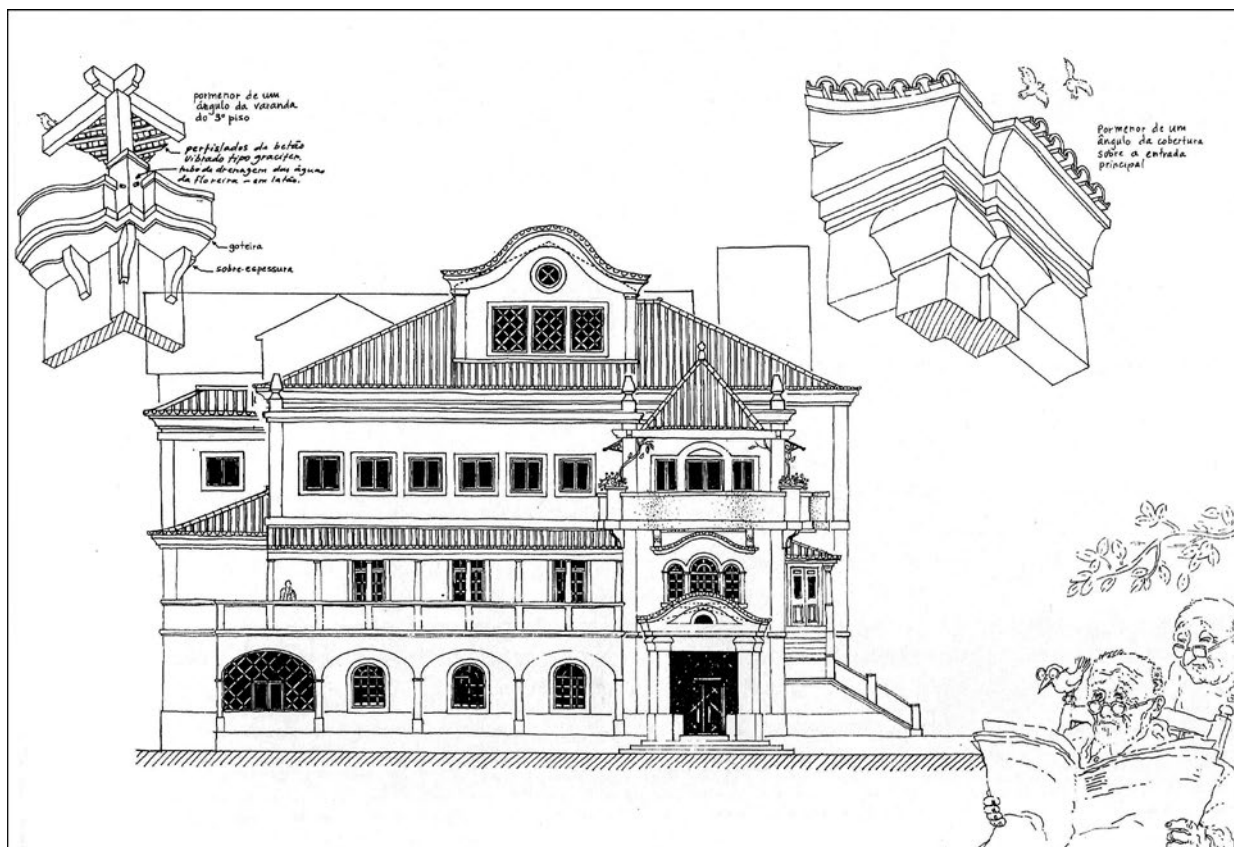


Fig. 14 Psycho-Geriatric Centre in Parede, 1982-85 (drawing). Cunha merges the elevation, a cartoon and axonometric technical perspectives in the same drawing.
(source: Luiz Cunha Archive, ISCTE-IUL)

shuttle-like towers – like the delirious Sanctuary of S. Bento da Porta Aberta in 1987-95 –, buildings still floated like those of Archigram, though now with giant gothic-arched legs – as the entry for the international competition for the Bank of Portugal in Lisbon in 1989 – and urban schemes were still articulated according to the Team 10 repertoire – like his “plan-structure” for Campus II of the University of Porto in 1974-82. Yet, perhaps the most eloquent example is Cunha’s manifesto-proposal for the rehabilitation of the centre of Angra do Heroísmo in the Azores in 1980-82, prophetically aiming to “build with the ruins” after Terceira Island’s devastating earthquake. Featuring in the postmodern exhibition *Depois do Modernismo* (Cunha, 1983) and clearly capturing the spirit of its time, Cunha’s cartoony drawings reveal a series of traditional blocks surrounded by a vernacular version of Le Corbusier’s Algiers or Quaroni’s Barene di San Giuliano. It is barely different from the idea of megastructure to which Cunha was alluding, over a decade before, in Rotterdam. Or perhaps it was upon the ruins of a megastructural legacy already gone that he was trying to build.

11. Coda

Cunha’s fearless collage-like approach to architecture allows a clear of reading his influences and his non-linear evolution from *Corbusian*

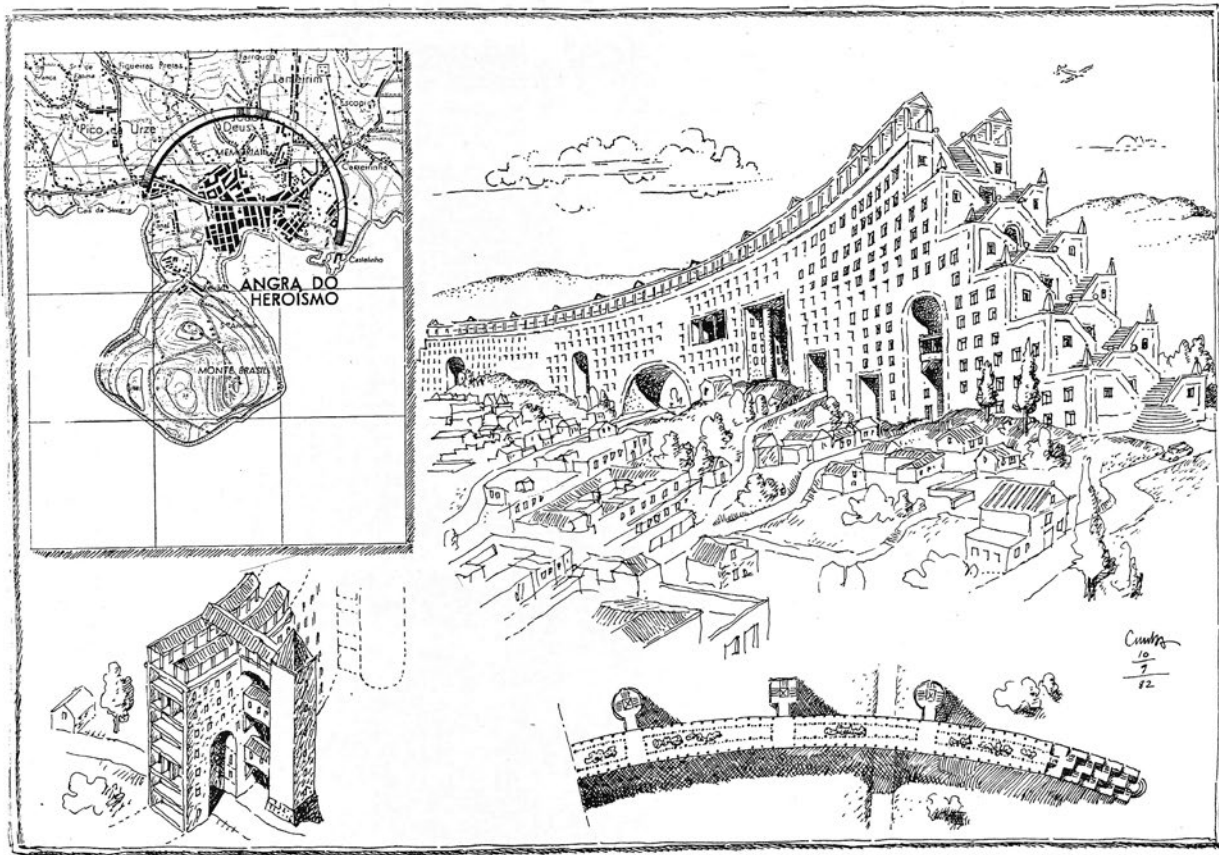


Fig. 13 "Suggestions for a non-bureaucratic plan for the reconstruction of the city of Angra do Heroísmo/Azores", 1982 (drawing, excerpt). (source: Serpa, 1983)

brutalism to neo-vernacular, with many excurses and detours. At first sight, his experimentations with techno-pop architecture and interest in megastructures and capsules might seem like early flirtations with international trends and a product of their time, which he himself disregarded (Cunha, 2015). Yet what this analysis tries to demonstrate is that they are intrinsically part of a pop sensibility that constitutes an important part of Cunha's work, together with the "use, the resource, the survival of humour" (G. Dias, 2012, p. 134). Just like his cartoony drawings – bringing the aesthetics and the mechanics of comics into architectural representation – which he cultivated throughout his career, these 'megastructural ingredients' remained vivid in Cunha's way of thinking and designing architecture, even after his shift towards postmodernism and neo-vernacular eclecticism.

Furthermore, they constitute a relevant testimony of one of the (few) episodes of exploration of pop culture by Portuguese architects and incursion into specific topics of the international debate from the 1950s to the 1980s. Given the many contributions and connections his work establishes – either on the reflection about Portuguese context, the renovation of religious architecture or the debates on cities and the metropolis – we believe Cunha deserves further attention and more polyhedric insights within Portuguese architectural historiography.

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- 1 → See, for instance, the drawing “Robot”, the mural “Anjos” at Ameixoeira Parochial Centre in Lisbon, 2012, or the painting “Jesus, Centro da História da Salvação”, 2004 (Miranda, 2012: pp. 20, 25, 139).
- 2 → The Townscape theory and campaign was abundantly discussed in The Architectural Review from 1949 on and summarised in Gordon Cullen’s Townscape in 1961.
- 3 → MRAR was a liturgical movement, founded by Nuno Teotónio Pereira, involving architects, artists, planners and seminarians that reflected about the church for today in global terms (A. Cunha, 2015).
- 4 → Marques de Aguiar had studied with Auzelle at Institut d’Urbanisme de Paris in 1953-54.
- 5 → L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui 104/1962, Urbanisme 101/1967 and 179/1980.
- 6 → Interestingly, Candilis-Josic-Woods’ Berlin Free University, Denys Lasdun’s University of East Anglia and Sachio Otani’s Kanazawa Institute of Technology feature among Cunha’s references for his “plan-structure” for the Campus II of the University of Porto (Cunha quoted in Santos, 1974).
- 7 → Curiously, the same issue of Arquitectura features Candilis’ Toulouse-le-Mirail, Park Hill Estate in Sheffield, Stirling’s housing in Preston, and the projects for the Church of Sagrado Coração de Jesus, reinforcing the idea that large residential structures and churches – Cunha’s fields of interest – were particularly hot in the architectural debate.
- 8 → Cunha expected “to complete the picture with work from the centre and the south of the country in the second issue”, which did not happen.
- 9 → Godinho, Viana de Lima and Távora were already part of the itinerant exhibition Contemporary Portuguese Architecture in 1958, but this was the first international publication on Siza’s work. Curiously, Cunha would later collaborate with Godinho, in 1965-66, on the project for the new Municipal Theatre of Porto.
- 10 → Marcelo Costa (1927-1994) was a colleague of Cunha at ESAP and also attended Auzelle’s urbanism course in 1955, although he only graduated in 1965. One of the two “surreal” Portuguese architects – according to Manuel Vicente – Costa designed several techno-pop buildings close to the Archigram repertoire around 1968-74 (Figueira, 2014: p. 330).
- 11 → Interestingly, Raul Lino’s work was the subject of an exhibition at the Gulbenkian Foundation in 1970, being highly rejected by the Porto School, notably Pedro Vieira de Almeida’s controversial “Raul Lino arquitecto moderno” for the catalogue. Later, Vieira de Almeida would return to Lino, describing him as a “pre-postmodern architect” (Maia, 2014), which inevitably resonates with Cunha.
- 12 → Krier met Cunha while working as a consultant for the Archeological Museum of S. Miguel de Odrinhas, Sintra, 1992-99.

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