ALCÂNTARA: MEMORY AND LEGACY OF AN INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT IN THE PROCESS OF CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE CITY OF LISBON.

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INTRODUCTION

From 1840, the industrial development of Lisbon led to the formation of new industrial zones distributed to the East and West of the city in proximity of the river. The choice of these two new industrial zones was determined by the need for larger spaces for factories that were beginning to specialize and require greater dimensions in terms of both land and plant use and the proximity to the river that provided a supply of raw materials and fuel. The industrial development of the entire area west of Lisbon was accompanied by further initiatives that altered the characteristics of the area, such as silting in Boavista, the modernization of the port of Lisbon and the opening of the railway line.

Since ancient times the natural characteristics of the area of Alcântara and the presence of the river had encouraged the establishment of various industrial activities such as tanneries and dye works.[1] Such industrial concentration tended to increase over the following decades with the continuous creation of new factories throughout the Alcântara area. Moving from the city centre towards the periphery of Alcântara, the Fabrica Goarmon Cª de Ladrilhos e Mosaicos, set up in 1877 in the district of São Paulo, was relocated in 1899 into the same street as the gunpowder factory.

The area would thus become distinguished for its textile factories, including the Texil Bernardo Daupiás factory, established in the Calvário area in 1844. Four years later the factory relocated to a new building. The Companhia Lisbonense printing and dyeing works, founded in 1874, was located within the gunpowder factory. This factory functioned until the first decade of the 20th century and was acquired prior to 1940 by the Sociedade Têxtil do Sul, although many of its spaces would subsequently be leased to other companies. Indeed, by 1985 many of these businesses still coexisted within the space.[2]

While the factories reported above were situated along the Alcântara canal, beside waterways that led to the aqueduct, it was the area of Calvário that would witness the establishment of the most significant textile company: The Companhia de Fiação e Tecidos Lisbonense, "which represents a historic brand in the evolution of architecture in Portugal and its industrial heritage in particular".[3] This building, with its northwest/southeast orientation, was built between 1846 and 1849, according to a design by the architect Pires da Fonte (1796-1873) and consists of 4 floors, to which a further floor was later added. With a length of 123 meters and steel pillars and beams covered with vaults of brick and cement it would constitute "the first great example of 'iron architecture' in Portugal".[4]

This factory is also distinguished by an archetype imported from England and introduced to Portugal by the engineer Alexandre Black and an agent of the company that would provide the materials. The building was later occupied by the Companhia Industrial de Portugal and Colónias, the Anuario Comercial de Portugal, the Gráfica Mirandela typographers and is presently home to the LxFactory.

The "A Napolitana" factory is located in the same area. Originally owned by Gomes, Brito, Conceição, Reis & Cª, this pasta production plant is distinguished by the use of calcium-silicate bricks, a trademark of the Vieillard & Touzet construction company.

The "Sol" factory is also located in this area of Alcântara, which belonged to the Companhia União Fabril, founded in 1865 on the initiative of the Viscount of Junqueira. This enterprise had the objective of building a factory for the "production of detergents and soaps of all qualities, stearin candles, jatropha oil, and all known oils that have been gradually discovered and the trade of such products as well as the production and trade of tobacco…".[5]

However, the factory did not provide the expected results and the situation of the plant remained problematic until 1890. In 1898, on the initiative of Alfredo da Silva, the Companhia Aliança Fabril was merged into Sol, thus forming the Companhia União Fabril. The factory has today been converted into an apartment building yet the façade and the chimney are strangely decontextualized.

Analysis and interpretation of the Urban Landscape

The best synthetic representation of the nature of the district of Alcântara today would be that of a **tangled web**. Indeed, its fundamental nature can be recognized in its fragmented fabric; it is through the etymology of the word "text" that we recognize the key to these spaces. Barthes spoke of the text as a fragment, of the importance of finding meaning in the paratactic composition of language, bringing writing to a level zero where we are finally able to recognize the threads of hidden readings. The communication system network of the district presents a multiplicity of intertwinement. Just as fabric is intertwined, so are the streets, railways, public transport, bridges and rivers, giving life to structures such as the station, port, quays and docks. The river Tejo has assigned functions to the built-up landscape: industrial buildings and structures built to support production. In addition to the Tejo, buildings have also had to take into account the presence of a system of tributaries including the Alcântara canal. The arrival of the railway reinforced the existing centrality of communications, allowing the further development of industrial production. Finally, the construction of the 25 de Abril bridge brought about the ultimate polarity of the distinct and its urban image. It remains however a place of landing, a place of passage, a place of production, a place of residence and a place of a strongly marked identity.

The complexity of communication channels has given rise to a wealth of possibilities for the reading of the urban space. The various urban features are found at a range of altitudes that, from an aerial perspective, permeate the district, causing the reader to lose all points of reference. It is thus not uncommon to see the built feature of a bridge sweeping over the roofs of previously built homes, or to read the façade of an abandoned industrial building from an unusual height such as a viaduct crossing a main street.

In search of identity

How may the issue of identity be approached in a place characterized by such complex signs? Which elements should be chosen that establish the parameters from which we either move away or approach an original identity? How is this achieved?

When discussing identity, it is necessary to interact with those issues which relate to the memory of the events that built it. Conceiving of architecture as a "built text" leads to a realization of the complexity of such an exercise, as every time we refer to a 'word', the same word, spoken by different voices or by the same voice from different heights, producing different sounds, each building provokes differing images depending on who benefits from it and these images remain in the minds of everyone with different features and modes: "…*All these images accumulate in the brain or, should the brain choose, which one will it prefer?*".[6] We are therefore immediately aware of how difficult it is, for those who enter into a relationship with an urban memory, to select signs that should be maintained, above all if these spatial signs have suffered from "urban amnesia" over time, including abandonment, demolition, replacement and depopulation.

What kind of memory should we hold for a place born with an industrial identity of this level? We could choose to align ourselves with one of two extreme states; the first in which we would employ "*a totally contemplative memory, with a vision only able to learn in the singular*" which promotes the memory of differences and unconditionally accepts all changes, all amnesia, all intrusions and the anomalies of identity. A second approach would be to assume a "*fully motoric memory, which imprints the sign of the generality of actions and promotes the perception of similarities*" and, therefore, having established which is to be our principal identity, acts to ensure compliance with that and only that.[7]

Yet these two concepts would not be complete without the addition of that which in phenomenology refers to the perception we have of the duration of transformations in urban space [8]. Thus, in order to decipher the architectural object, be it a factory, home or specialist building extended in its temporality, it is necessary to have a *fluid perception* of the succession of its change. This same concept is employed by Husserl when describing the temporal structure of the "stream of consciousness"[9].

However, when we are faced with such a strongly structured urban fabric, the perception we have of buildings is both a "synthesis of identity" and a "temporal synthesis". The consciousness of time must therefore be regarded as a formal condition of the possibility of the perception of an object.[10] In the fluidity of time and the sequence of transformations, we should also contemplate those moments in which we witness the "dissolution" of space or, rather, the loss of buildings.

How should planning stages be correctly carried out when faced with an architectural absence brought about by demolition or by abandonment?

We could talk of a **principle of discontinuity**, i.e. having the courage to accept the "empty", assuming that when a building has finished its dialogue with the urban space, it is not necessarily the case that an outright substitution is an essential action. [11]

We would continue with **a principle of specificity**, which would save us from the constant temptation towards the museumization of all things and render us constant accomplices of knowledge, "*not resolving discourse in a game of preconceived meanings; not imagining that the world makes our faces readable, we would only have to decipher; the world is not an accomplice of our knowledge*". [12]

In cases such as the district of Alcântara, questions are raised regarding such innovative strategies and which ideas to adopt in order to "save" the place. Four concepts have, very generally, dominated the traditional history of creativity: **meaning, originality, unity** and **creation**. Generally we seek the "*point of creation, the unity of a work, of an epoch or a theme, the mark of individual originality, and the undefined treasure of hidden meanings*".[13] However, as Foucault points out, the concept of **event** (as opposed to creation), **regularity** (as opposed to originality), of **possibility** (as opposed to meaning)

and the concept of the **series** (as opposed to unity) should perhaps instead be employed as regulatory principles.

The reappropriation of spaces

In the most important of the industrial complexes of the earliest examples of Portuguese industrial textile architecture, associated with energy and steam, the Lx "culture factory" has been established. with the aim of replacing past "industrial production" with modern "cultural production", and of creating a symbiosis between work and recreational areas (a cosmopolitan, dynamic, cultural, business and creative space with bars, restaurants, co-working, shops). The factory, converted into a new semantic urban centre far from the disturbing concept of the first industrial revolution, has become an archetype of the Cultural Revolution. Springing up from this place, as a real dynamic of germination, expressions of urban culture have proliferated around the concept and today Alcântara is the district where the most innovative forms of art come to life. The artist Vilhs has dedicated his work to one of the great façades of an abandoned building, the Village Underground Lisboa in the Carris Museum, where recovered containers have been used as spaces to host cultural events.

The new form of "spatial occupation", legitimized by the absence of functional historical production, has reinforced the complexity that the district itself already possessed. The sudden and irreverent presence of urban art accelerates the reading process, it fractures it, chops it up until reaching saturation point, then quickly reassembles a new language of identity which is now already in the new forms of the urban present. Is it acceptable to replace a "work culture" with a "culture of leisure time" in a location with such a strong productive identity?

Such discourse flows when our field of interpretation is art and its manifestations, yet the factory is an anthropological space, which contains memories, organizational hierarchies, knowledge, constructive wisdom, flows of goods and materials. Every factory builds a protocol of relations, from the first moment of its foundation, within the district that hosts it, and defines the words of the dialogue which will be developed from that moment on. The factory has an identity and creates further identities within it. The factory creates atmosphere, once filled with voices, the noises of machines, means of transport, smells and striking contrasts. Imagine what producing multiple, extended histories may signify to every member of a community in a neighbourhood: every inhabitant becomes a carrier of histories and a conductor of memories and the materialization of buildings is the result of such a flow: "Historicity means not simply that things are placed in a certain point in history, but that I carry my history with me: my past experiences have an effect on the way we understand the world and the people I meet in the world".[14]

How many of those, mostly tourists, who walk among such industrial spaces today are able to relive or at least "smell" this atmosphere?

If these intrusions through artistic language dynamize the process and delay spatial oblivion, it is perhaps appropriate to question how long an alteration of identity (albeit having remained in the realm of "creative production") will stand up to the comparison of time.

I believe we should certainly, as a healthy attitude in imaginative design, get away from the usual comforting willingness to museumize everything that once had a role and a specific meaning. A factory does not always stop talking the language of functional production in order to hide in the nostalgic materialization of a semantic memory. Perhaps it would be healthier to provide "work" beyond places where they produced "work". Indeed, the Lx Factory co-working in the halls of the textile factory was partly envisaged in this perspective.

Yet the entire building fabric that supported and made "daily" the industrial space failed to follow this process of functional revitalization. The redevelopment of industrial buildings into luxury condominiums contributed to an even more evident phenomenon of alienation, separating the connective tissue of the neighbourhood marked by a single and "unique" constructive intervention with an aesthetic criteria *à la page*. The re-functioning of buildings previously allocated to workers as housing, converting them into hotels or holiday homes is helping to strengthen this process. This is creating a change of voice, a change of face, a change of sounds and is removing the **normality** of everyday actions that a neighbourhood of this kind had, has and should have in the near future.

And it is with the term "normality" that we conclude, borrowing it as a final synthetic image, with the intention that the condition of normality leads us back towards habit and regularity and away from exception and randomness.
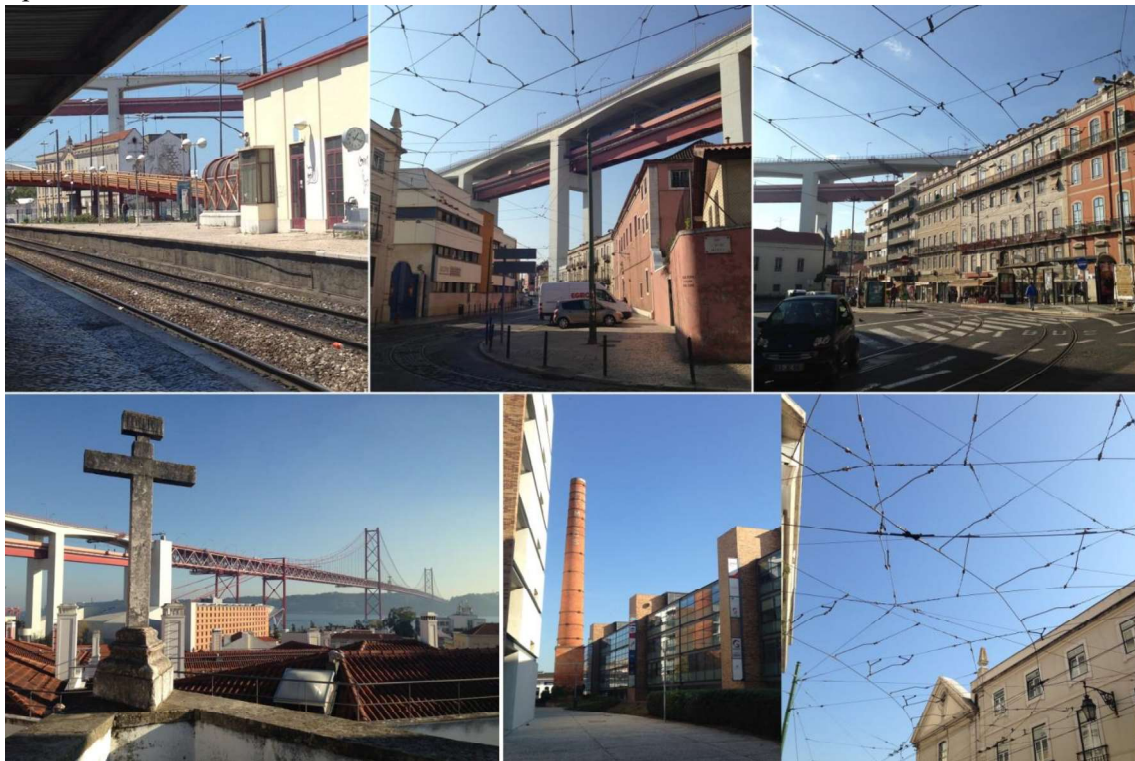

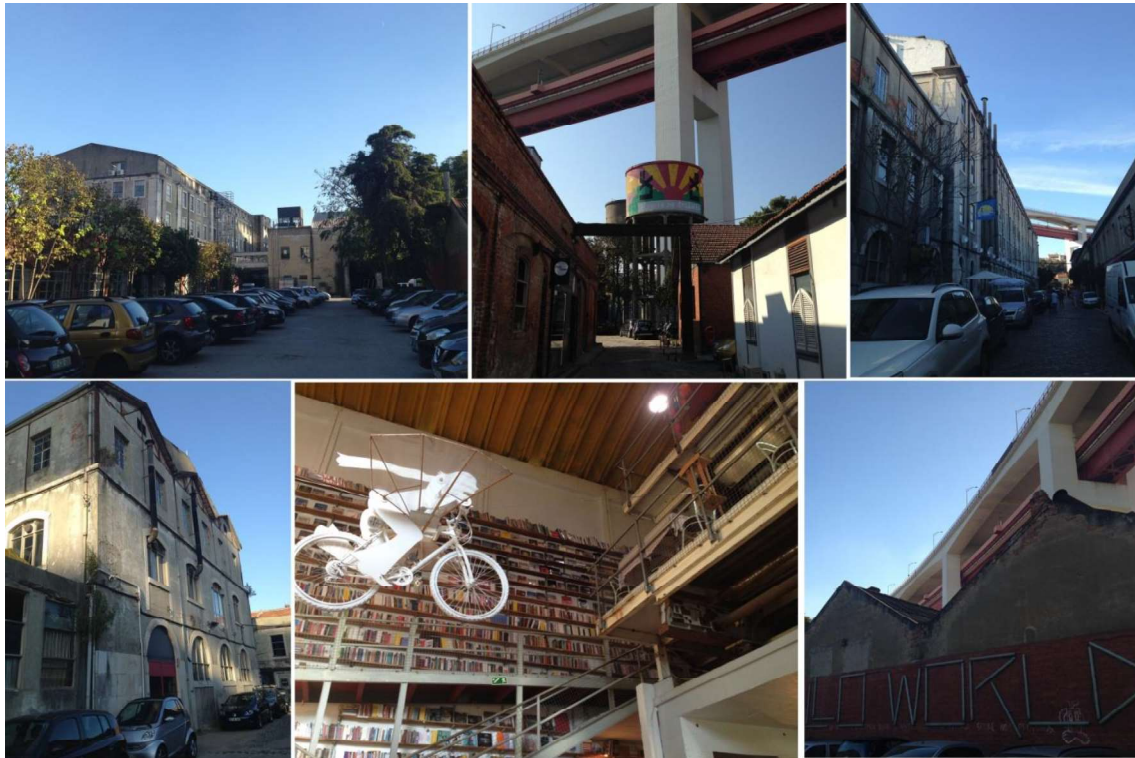*Fig. 1: Alcântara views. Photograph of Raffaella Maddaluno*

Fig. 2: Lx Factory – Alcântara. Photograph of Raffaella Maddaluno
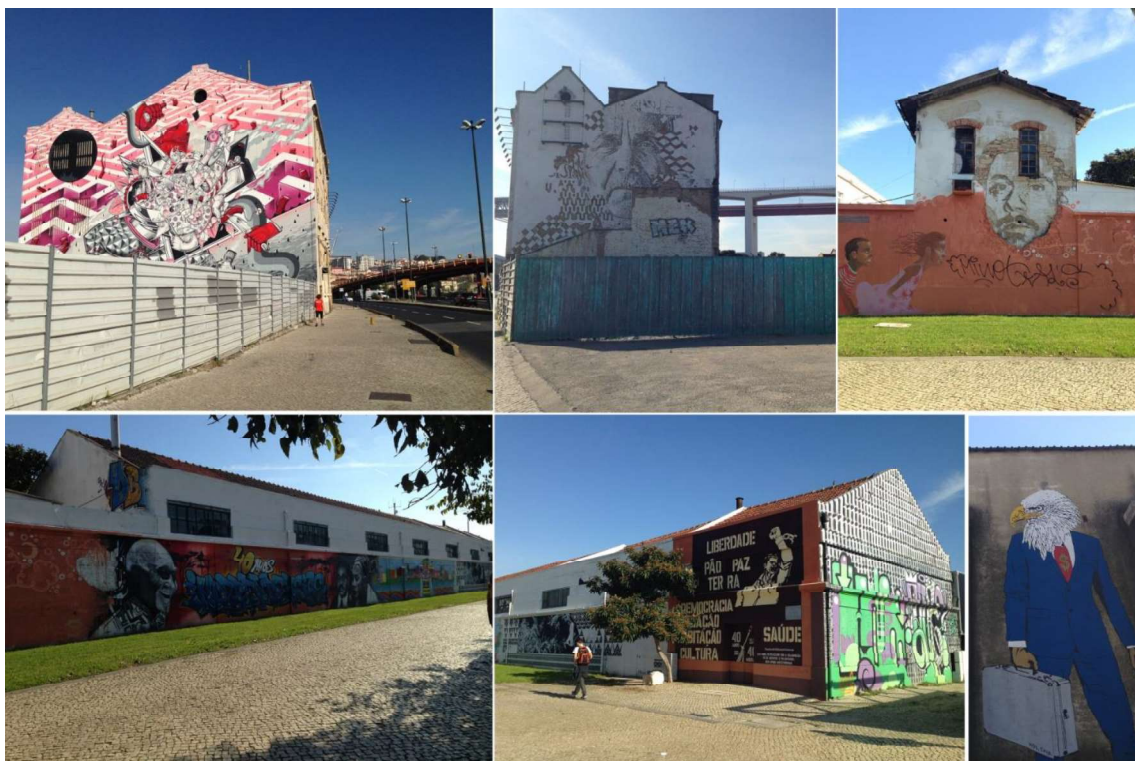

Fig. 3: Street Art – Alcântara. Photograph of Raffaella Maddaluno

Fig. 4: R.M., Village Underground Lisbon- Museum Carris

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[2] Maria Clara Assunção, "Inventário do Heritage Industrial de Lisboa. Alcântara", *I Jornadas Ibéricas Heritage Industrial y Obra Publica*, Seville, Regional Government of Andalucia, 1994, pp.150-158. This work is part of the Lisbon Factory Inventory which affected the areas of Belém, Alcântara, Vale de Chelas and Campo Grande, carried out by the APPI (Portuguese Association for Industrial Archaeology) and coordinated by Ana Cardoso de Matos.

[3] Maria Luísa Santos, Ana M. Cardoso de Matos, António Maria A Santos "A Fábrica de FIACAO and Tecidos Lisbonense: uma de preservação proposal". In *PINHEIRO*, Elisa (ed.), *Actas III Jornadas de Arqueologia Industrial*, Covilhã, Universidade da Beira Interior, 2002, pp. 499-517.

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[6] Henri Bergson, *Materia e memoria,* Adriano Pessina (Ed.), Bari, Editori Laterza, 1996, p. 99

[7] Ibid, pp. 131-132

[8] Shaun Gallagher, Dan Zahavi, *La mente fenomenologica,* Raffaello Cortina (Ed.), Milan, 2009, pp. 116-117

[9] Edmund Husserl, *phantasy, image consciousness, and memory (1898-1925)*, translated by John B. Brough, Springer, pp. 127-128

[10] Ibid., pag. 123

[11] Michel Foucault, *L'ordine del discorso*, in "Il discorso, la storia, la verità, interventi 1969-1984", Mauro Bertani (Ed.), Turin, Giulio Einaudi (Ed.), 2001, pp. 30-31

[12] Ibid, pp. 30-31

[13] Ibid, pp. 30-31
[14] Ibid., p. 135

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