From international context to Portuguese urban planning: creativity on mechanical aesthetics in Planos Gerais de Urbanização

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Abstract

It is known that cars have given rise to new spatial relations between the territory, the urban form, the population and the architecture. Space became understood not by distance units, but rather by space/time relations. In the modern age, the City was therefore transformed based on overcoming stabilised urban models. Objectivity was then called into question with new theories. In that approach, the car intensified the closeness between form and function - and modern architects would see this binomial as a manifest, an aesthetic concern, as Le Corbusier (1887-1965) witnessed it in Vers une Architecture. In short, an apology came out as a fascination with the machine, which replaced the importance of the machine in itself. Consequently, the thinking of new urban spaces reflected an idea of progress symbolised by the car. Portugal, a country living under a nationalistic right-wing dictatorship (1926-1974) in a contradiction between local and global, tradition and modernity, allow the question on how the mechanical aesthetics set up the architects’ thinking having presented the aforementioned scope. The creative ideas towards a new territorial thinking were also real in Portugal, putting in practice the same fascination for the car. Nevertheless, they did not wholly prevail, nor in the international context. This paper aims to set up the closeness between those two contexts.

Keywords: modern Portuguese urban planning, Planos Gerais de Urbanização, car, mechanical aesthetics, Estado Novo