

MENTIONS TO VERNACULAR TRADITION: THE ROLE OF PRECEDENT IN LUCIO COSTA'S ARCHITECTURAL CONCEPTION

*Menções à tradição popular: o papel do precedente na concepção arquitetônica de
Lucio Costa*

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Abstract

This paper critically examines various texts by architect and urbanist Lucio Costa, highlighting his mentions of popular tradition to understand the rationale behind his use of precedent as the foundation of his architectural conception. The analysis begins with Costa's 1937 text "Documentação Necessária" ("Necessary Documentation"), which reinforces the role of popular tradition. This complements his 1934 text "Razões da Nova Arquitetura" ("Reasons for the New Architecture")—a foundational work for Brazilian modern architecture that primarily referenced erudite tradition. Together, these texts established Costa's theoretical foundations by striking a balance between mentions of colonial vernacular and classical academic traditions, thereby shaping the development of modern architecture in Brazil. The selected texts span from the 1930s to the 1980s, providing insight into how Costa's discourse legitimised his architectural approach. Costa sought a synthesis rather than merely imitating vernacular colonial tradition or breaking entirely from the past, as many contemporaries did. His position contrasts with the dominant modernist narrative that viewed architecture as a rupture from historical references, favouring a universal aesthetic rooted in technology and function. Costa's singular role in Brazilian modernism emerges from his continuous engagement with scholarly and vernacular historical precedents. His architectural thought demonstrates a deliberate integration of tradition, ensuring continuity while embracing modern principles.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa criticamente diversos textos do arquiteto e urbanista Lúcio Costa, destacando as suas referências à tradição popular para compreender a lógica subjacente ao uso do precedente como base da sua conceção arquitetônica. A análise começa pelo texto de 1937 de Costa, «Documentação Necessária», que reforça o papel da tradição popular. Isto complementa o texto de 1934, «Razões da Nova Arquitetura», um trabalho fundacional para a arquitetura moderna brasileira que se apoava sobretudo na tradição erudita. Em conjunto, estes textos estabelecem os alicerces teóricos de Costa ao equilibrar as referências à tradição vernácula colonial e às tradições académicas clássicas, moldando assim o desenvolvimento da arquitetura moderna no Brasil. Os textos selecionados abrangem o período dos anos 1930 aos anos 1980, oferecendo pistas sobre a forma como o discurso de Costa legitimou a sua abordagem arquitetônica. Costa procurou uma síntese, em vez de simplesmente imitar a tradição vernácula colonial ou romper por completo com o passado, como fizeram muitos dos seus contemporâneos. A sua posição contrasta com a narrativa modernista dominante, que via a arquitetura como uma ruptura em relação às referências históricas, privilegiando uma estética universal enraizada na tecnologia e na função. O papel singular de Costa no modernismo brasileiro decorre do seu envolvimento contínuo com precedentes históricos eruditos e vernáculos. O seu pensamento arquitetônico evidencia uma integração deliberada da tradição, assegurando a continuidade ao mesmo tempo que acolhe os princípios modernos.

Key-words: *Architectural theory; Modernism in Brazil; Historical continuity; Design methodology.*

Palavras-chave: *Teoria da arquitetura; Modernismo no Brasil; Continuidade histórica; Metodologia de projeto.*

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INTRODUCTION

The present study situates itself within the corpus of published writings by architect and urbanist Lucio Costa (1902–1998), subjecting them to a critical reading that will progressively delineate the thematic scope indicated by the title of this work: the role of precedent in Lucio Costa's architectural conception. The significance of Costa's written legacy is widely acknowledged, making its selection as an object of study self-evident. From the outset, this investigation has been driven by the remarkable impact of the theoretical foundations he proposed for the practice of modern architecture in Brazil—foundations that influenced generations of architecture students and professionals, particularly during the pioneering phase of the movement, marked by profound uncertainties and transformations in both society and architectural production.

Costa's collection of essays on modern architecture became a landmark in the development of the Modern Movement in Brazil, cementing his position as the intellectual leader of the introduction and establishment of what was then referred to as "the new architecture" in the country. A distinguishing feature of his writings is the persistent mentions of both erudite and popular traditions, which he presents as interconnected historical phenomena. Costa emphasises the architectural significance of precedents emerging from both traditions, seeking to create links that facilitate harmonious transitions into the future—without abrupt ruptures—while still recognising and reinterpreting the valuable contributions of the past as part of an ongoing evolutionary process.

Examining Costa's mentions of tradition reveals his engagement with the erudite architectural tradition and the vernacular residential architecture of the colonial period as they relate to the role of precedent in his architectural conception. For Costa, the distinction between erudite and vernacular architecture does not stem from appearance alone but rather from how each is conceived and constructed. Erudite architecture follows a design and execution process that involves specialised knowledge acquired through formal academic training or artistic self-instruction. In contrast, vernacular architecture is produced by laypersons—those who have not studied architecture as a discipline. This includes users and builders who, through empirical practice, execute their constructions.

This paper aims to delineate Costa's theoretical reflections on precedent and to explore the rationale behind tradition as articulated in his numerous texts. These texts, despite their significance, have received relatively little comprehensive analysis compared to his architectural projects, which have been extensively studied.

Thus, the primary focus of this article is to understand why Costa placed such value on colonial popular tradition—an approach aligned with the pedagogical concerns of Julien Guadet (Guadet, 1909)—rather than simply examining how he incorporated it into his projects, though these aspects remain interconnected. To achieve this, it is necessary to clarify certain architectural composition concepts central to Costa's theoretical framework. His writings are deeply rooted in the architectural principles established by Guadet (1909), which shaped the education of Costa's generation. These include architectural elements, compositional elements, and compositional rules. Architectural elements refer to the physical components of buildings, such as walls, windows, columns, and roofs, which often contain stylistic references (e.g., classical capitals, Gothic pointed arches, colonial windows, and Portuguese tiles). Compositional elements pertain to the spatial volumes created by the arrangement of architectural elements (e.g., rooms, halls, porticos, naves, and auditoriums), which can vary in dimension and geometric form.

According to Guadet (1909), architectural and compositional elements can be learned by simply observing historical examples. However, understanding the rules that govern their composition requires a deeper analytical effort to grasp the organisational principles underlying major architectural works of the past. This process unfolds in three stages, as Guadet (1909) outlined in the final section of *Chapitre premier*: first, one must understand architectural elements; second, compositional elements; and finally, composition itself. To comprehend architectural design fully, one must first identify individual physical components (walls, doors, windows, pillars, ceilings, staircases); next, examine how these components form spatial volumes (rooms, corridors, halls); and lastly, understand how these volumes are arranged into a coherent whole, using compositional rules such as axis systems, symmetry, volumetric hierarchy, proportioning methods, and tectonic articulation.

A crucial consideration that strengthens the argument of this study and predates the present article is that it involves two significant scholarly works that offer insights into Costa's use of tradition in his architectural practice. In 1954, the book *Artigos e Estudos de Costa* (Articles and Studies of Costa), developed by scholars at the Faculty of Architecture at UFRGS under the guidance of architectural theory professor Edgard Graeff (Centro de Estudos de Teoria de Arquitetura, 1954), presented an analysis in which Costa is observed to extract compositional rules from the classical erudite tradition and integrate them with new technologies and the Brazilian context. Later, in his doctoral dissertation, Carlos Eduardo Dias Comas revisited these preliminary observations, emphasising the influence of Guadet's theoretical framework on Costa's academic formation. Comas (2002) asserted that Costa drew compositional rules from the erudite classical tradition while deriving architectural and compositional elements from the colonial popular tradition, which were then adapted to the principles and technologies introduced by the Modern Movement.

From these readings and other bibliographical sources on the subject, a central question emerged: if the focus of this article is the role of precedent in Costa's architectural conception, how exactly is this notion articulated in his written work? Can the previously mentioned theses provide direct evidence of this conceptual foundation in his thinking, given that both scholars primarily analysed Costa's architectural projects rather than his published texts? Or does this inquiry necessitate a broader reinterpretation of his writings? This leads to the core research question: how does Costa mentions these traditions in his texts, and through this examination, how can we uncover the theoretical rationale he provides for legitimising their use? The answer to this dual question will unfold throughout the article through a critical analysis of Costa's writings, progressively presented and discussed, focusing on his mentions of colonial popular tradition.

BRIDGING TRADITION VERNACULAR AND MODERNITY: LUCIO COSTA'S THEORETICAL LEGACY

Bridging tradition vernacular and modernity: Lucio Costa's theoretical legacy

The text "Documentação Necessária" was published in 1937 in the first issue of the journal "Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional" (SPHAN) (Costa, 1995c). According to Costa (1995c), in this text, dated 1938, in the book "Registro de uma vivência" vernacular architecture in Portugal is of greater interest than scholarly architecture because it differentiates the art of the people from that of intellectuals. This distinction allows a better understanding of Brazil's colonial vernacular architectural tradition. Costa asserts that in rural constructions, the qualities of the humbler population appear in their purest and most natural form, reflecting on their architecture. He believes that by analysing these precedents, it is possible to identify still-valid elements that can be recovered and applied in contemporary architectural practice:

Our houses, in comparison to the opulence of Italian 'palazzi' and 'Ville,' French castles, English 'mansions' of the same period, or the rich and ostentatious appearance of many Hispanic-American estates, or even the palatial and showy aspect of specific noble Portuguese residences, often appear unassuming and poor. However, claiming that they have no architectural value and lack expressive quality is a misconception that does not correspond to reality. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to study them more closely, not necessarily to counter such misconceptions—as that would grant them undue importance—but to offer those who have recently been dedicated to studying our heritage the opportunity to utilise them as material for further research. Likewise, for us modern architects, these buildings provide lessons from more than three hundred years of experience, not to be imitated in their now-lifeless appearance but to be critically assimilated and integrated into contemporary design (Costa, 1995c, p. 458).

When analysing Costa's perspective on the importance of precedent, it becomes clear that he values both colonial vernacular traditions and classical academic traditions equally. In both cases, he argues that these architectural legacies hold valuable lessons and can serve as material for research and critical interpretation in modern architecture. As Costa states:

"to avoid the repetition of similar misconceptions or misinterpretations (...)."

However, he also asserts:

"(...) so that we, modern architects, can draw lessons from their centuries-old experience in a manner that does not involve merely replicating their now-lifeless appearance."

Costa thus proposes a critical approach to solutions derived from colonial vernacular traditions, believing that appreciated precedents can inform the conception of modern architecture. This position starkly contrasts with the architects who produced neocolonial architecture, which merely replicated decorative elements reminiscent of colonial buildings. This distinction, evident in the latter part of the quoted passage, suggests Costa's critique of this stylistic approach.

Costa then explicitly positions himself against neocolonialism and provides a general overview of the characteristics of houses built throughout Brazil over the centuries, culminating in the most straightforward constructions made of pau-a-pique, featuring an independent structural framework. He associates this construction technique, rooted in colonial vernacular traditions, with the new technology of reinforced concrete:

[...] without forgetting, finally, the 'minimal' house, as it is now called, the home of settlers and—importantly—the only one among them still 'alive' throughout the country, despite its seemingly fragile appearance. As one leaves the city, these houses immediately appear along the roadside, just beyond Petrópolis, even beside summer homes with a cinematic aesthetic. Made from nearby timber and earth, like animal burrows, they shelter entire families—infants, children, older girls, the elderly—all mingling in an atmosphere of illness and stagnation, waiting... (the capitalist neighbour—sporty, 'aerodynamic,' and a good Catholic—cares only about what tourists will think). However, no one pays attention, so accustomed are they to this site, as if these houses were part of the land itself, like anthills, wild fig trees, and corn stalks—it is the earth continuing. Nevertheless, precisely for this reason, for being an authentic part of the land, they hold a respectable and dignified significance for us architects, whereas the 'pseudo-Mission, Norman, or Colonial' houses beside them are nothing more than indecorous imitations. Moreover, the ingenious construction technique used—earth reinforced with wood—bears some resemblance to our reinforced concrete. This method could be suitable for summer houses and affordable constructions in general with proper modifications, such as raising the floors off the ground and whitewashing the walls to prevent humidity and insect infestations. This was our intention when designing the workers' village in Monlevade, near Sabará, at the invitation of the Companhia Siderúrgica Belgo-Mineira—though, as expected, the project was not taken seriously (Costa, 1995c, pp. 458–459).

At this point in the text, Costa reveals that precedents from the scholarly tradition should be analysed to extract their intrinsic compositional principles, which can then be used to develop and support architectural creation. In the previous citation, it is evident that vernacular precedents provide knowledge of traditional techniques and materials with the same ultimate purpose as scholarly precedents: critically supporting architectural creation. Thus, Costa appears to designate different types of extraction for precedents from distinct traditions, yet both serve the same function—to theoretically ground architectural practice. Costa's own words reinforce this idea:

The study should further examine various construction systems and techniques, the different floor plan solutions and how they varied across regions, determining in each case the reasons—whether programmatic, technical, or otherwise—for certain design choices. Roofs, initially simple in the main structure, later extended like a hen's wing to cover porches, extensions, and outbuildings, avoiding lanterns and never employing the Mansard roof so fashionable in the metropolis, yet always maintaining the unmistakable silhouette of the Portuguese roof. In the smaller roofs of sugar mills and farms—as seen in period engravings—a softer, stretched-out line contributed to their characteristic drowsy impression. Ceilings lined with 'camisa e saia' (a traditional wooden finish) adapted to the roof structure; the joinery and hardware detailing common models such as panelled doors, sash windows with security panels, and protective jalousies—with shutters only appearing in the 19th century; [...] A more thorough examination would yield interesting observations, contradicting certain prevailing prejudices and supporting modern architectural experiments, demonstrating how contemporary architecture also aligns with a naturally evolving process (Costa, 1995c, pp. 458–459).

Once again, it is worth remembering that this article focuses on Costa's reasons for using tradition, not what he uses it for. So, the question in this article is: What are Costa's reasons for using popular traditions from the colonial period? In the text 'Razões da Nova Arquitetura' (Reasons for the New Architecture) from 1934, it is possible to see some possible reasons for Costa to base modern architecture on valuing the precedent of erudite tradition. In short, one of the possible reasons would be in defence of the very insertion of the new architecture, in the sense of trying to reconcile the conflicting positions of professionals who were satisfied with the novelty but tended to break with everything that had gone before, and others who were dissatisfied because they believed that it broke with tradition.

Costa cleverly points out in his text *Razões* that the formal expression may be new, a direct consequence of new technologies, but the link with the erudite tradition of architecture is perennial because he conceives it in the same way as the ancients did through the arrangement of compositional principles. In other words, by extracting its *essence* from the same thing—in the case of the precedent coming from the erudite tradition—its laws or compositional principles that make it up and critically reinterpreting it to apply in design practice, regardless of the era or style it represents.

Thus, Costa seems to want to please everyone by seeking conciliation in the name of love for his architecture, and this would be another possible reason for his ideological precepts regarding the fact that Costa believes that one can only create an architecture of excellence by maintaining a permanent knowledge of the precedent, even if the new architecture, in its stylistic appearance, is different from the one that influenced it. This last observation also seems to fit in with the reasons for the precedent coming from popular tradition, as can be seen in the quote above, when Costa gives a detailed account of what critical analyses should be carried out in order to subsidise architectural creation in the sense of its evolution, stating that:

' [...] From a less hasty examination, curious observations would result at odds with certain current prejudices and in support of the experiences of modern architecture, even showing how it also fits within the evolution that was normally taking place.'

The other possible reason may lie in the fact that he was trying to make a connection with the place. In a country with few examples of erudite architecture worthy of being considered true by Costa, the author takes a stand against the eclecticism and neo-colonialism produced in the country at the beginning of the 20th century. The main reason is that their forms did not necessarily result from the construction technique used. So many of their architectural elements were merely decorative elements, unlike the architecture of popular tradition from the colonial period in which its form was the result of its construction.

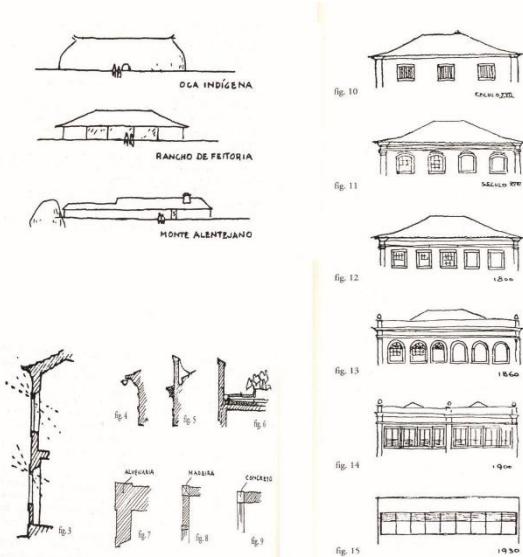
In this context, architecture from a popular tradition, where its aesthetic, even if considered interesting, does not have the essence of compositional laws and principles like architecture from the erudite tradition. If it has them, they are generated unconsciously, so in this respect, Costa seems not to consider them in terms of important lessons learnt for a critical reinterpretation of the precedent and the extraction of its

knowledge for the creation of modern architecture. According to Costa's thinking, only compositional elements and architectural elements from popular tradition would be worthy of reusing their lessons by incorporating them into the needs and technologies of the Modern Movement.

The most important factor lies in what will be discussed later, namely, the fact that in Costa's thinking, concerning the reasons that led him to value so highly the construction carried out in the colonial period that came from popular tradition, there is an important concept of architectural excellence, which he will clarify in texts that will be better analysed later, namely: the interdependence between the construction technique used and the resulting architectural form.

Following on from the analysis in this text, Costa will look at the typological evolution of Brazilian houses, identifying the predominance of the solids (walls) about the voids (openings), which over the centuries has been inverted, arriving at the current moment, when we see the predominance of the empty over the full. At the end of the 16th century and throughout the 17th century, houses were predominantly full over empty. With the increase in policing, windows gradually became larger; in the 18th century, full and empty were balanced and by the beginning of the 19th century, openings predominated; from 1850 onwards, the jambs practically met until the façade, and after 1900, began to appear almost entirely torn, often with common jambs. This happened slowly and can perhaps be associated with the glass panels that modern architecture was able to realise. Costa emphasises the importance of balconies from the popular colonial tradition and values the Portuguese master builder, as he believes he has much to teach. Figure 1 below refers to Costa's sketches, showing the evolutionary process of the tendency to increase openings on façades, as described in this paragraph, from the colonial period in Brazil, progressively, to the modern movement:

Figure 1. Drawings by Lucio Costa from the texts "Tradição Local" (Local Tradition) and "Documentação Necessária" (Necessary Documentation).



Source: (Costa, 1995d, p. 453).

What we are seeing, therefore, is a tendency to open up more and more. Moreover, it is understandable that this was the case with our climate because although there is so much talk about the luminosity of our skies, the excessive brightness of our days, etc., the fact is that balconies, when well-orientated, are the best place our houses have for people to stay; and what is a balcony, after all, if not a completely open room? However, when we modern architects want to leave the well-orientated side of the rooms completely open: aqui del Rey! This shows that the master builders were still on the right track in 1910. Faithful to the good Portuguese tradition of not lying, they were naturally applying all the new possibilities of modern technique to their rather ugly buildings, such as the almost entirely open façades, the very thin iron columns, the balcony floors reinforced with double T's and vaults, the iron staircases, also loose and well-laid out - sometimes straight, sometimes S-curved, sometimes spiral, and various other features, as well as the unintentional search for a different plastic balance (Costa, 1995c, p. 463).

Analysing the above quote, we can see the value Costa gave to the compartment called the veranda, which will become one of the most important compositional elements for Costa, as seen in his critical interpretation and application of this space in his projects. In this respect, the veranda is a compositional element from the popular colonial tradition, taken up by Costa because he justifies it as a space suited to the Brazilian climate that can easily be critically reinterpreted for modern architecture. According to his own words:

"[...] the fact is that verandas, when well orientated, are the best place our houses must stay; and what is a veranda, if not a completely open room?"

Regarding the construction techniques employed by popular tradition in the 20th century, another important observation emerges when Costa states:

"Faithful to the good Portuguese tradition of not lying, they had naturally been applying to their somewhat unattractive constructions all the new possibilities of modern technology (...)."

Costa gradually begins to outline a line of thought that clarifies specific issues, asserting that construction techniques derived from popular tradition may sometimes result in forms that deviate from erudite aesthetic standards.

However, their main attribute is the intrinsic connection between the construction technique and the resulting form. In the previous sentence, using the word "*lying*"—which will be analysed in later chapters—suggests that Costa, through antinomy, seems to structure his theory of architectural excellence around opposing poles, such as the architectural concepts related to truth and falsehood. This observation hints at the notion that this interdependence between technology and the resulting aesthetics, stemming from the colonial popular tradition, may be one of the reasons why Costa assigns such value to these precedents.

In this text, published in the 1930s, one can observe a shift in Costa's thinking regarding what he once considered a misconception—namely, the application of historical styles characteristic of eclecticism and the attempt to revive the colonial architectural tradition through the neocolonial movement. This shift is evident in the following passage:

It was then that the so-called 'traditionalist movement' emerged, with the best intentions, and we were part of it as well. We failed to see that true tradition was right there, just a few steps away, with the master builders of our time. Instead, we sought, through an artificial process of adaptation—completely detached from the greater reality that was increasingly asserting itself and to which the master builders were adapting with simplicity and good sense—the lifeless elements of the colonial era: if we were to feign, we might as well feign something of our own. Furthermore, the farce would have continued—had it not been for what happened next. It is now our responsibility to recover all this lost time, extending our hand to the master builder, always so reviled, to the old 'Portugal' of 1910, because, say what they will—it was he who, alone, preserved the true tradition (Costa, 1995c, p. 461).

This passage reinforces the idea that Costa values colonial popular architecture at its roots and asserts that only the relevant architectural heritage elements should be reused—provided they are inseparable from a constructive truth and adequately adapted to the environment and the present moment. The architectural concepts related to falsehood and truth become evident when Costa refers to the "true tradition" embedded in the work of the master builders of colonial popular architecture, in contrast to the traditionalist movement's superficial attempt to stylistically revive it rather than critically reinterpret its essential architectural elements to inform modern architectural creation. At this point, Costa emphasises:

"If we were to feign, we might as well feign something of our own. Moreover, the farce would have continued—had it not been for what happened next."

Thus, it becomes evident that Costa's reasoning is linked to the study of precedents derived from the colonial popular tradition, as they fundamentally embody a true interdependence between technology and the resulting architectural form.

'Tradição local'

The text "Tradição local" was published in the book "Registro de uma vivência" in 1994 (1st edition) and in the book "Arquitetura" in 2002 (1st edition) (Costa, 1995f). In this text, Costa discusses Portuguese regional architecture of popular tradition, which originates from the land and is a consequence of the physical and social environment, economic conditions, and the development of its technology. He asserts that this architecture was brought to Brazil by its colonisers, enriched by the experiences of African and Eastern peoples based on their architectural craftsmanship, and ultimately adapted to the new environment. For this reason, Costa believes that understanding Portuguese regional architecture of a popular nature is crucial to better comprehending the roots of architecture in Brazil.

During his study trip, Costa observed differences between northern and southern Portuguese popular architecture and noted that the construction techniques used in each region of Portugal directly influenced the areas in Brazil most suited to them:

(...) From Beira Baixa, or the country's central belt, upwards, the contrast between stone and whitewashing prevails, as in Entre-Douro e Minho, or even the exclusive use of granite in large, rough or dressed blocks, as in Beira Alta and Trás-os-Montes. The pitch, or inclination of the four-sided tacaniça roofs, is generally softened using the so-called 'contrafeito,' a small complementary rafter specifically intended to ease the pitch and lend greater grace to the roof near the eaves (...). Each master, journeyman, or apprentice—mason, rammed-earth builder, carpenter, or plasterer—brought with him the memory of his province and the experience of his trade, which explains the simultaneous adoption, from the outset, of the differentiated architectural features inherent in each construction method: wattle and daub (pau-a-pique), adobe, brick masonry, and stone and lime (Costa, 1995f, p. 452).

According to Costa, the diversity of construction processes brought from Portugal to Brazil during the first two centuries gradually became defined by specific periods and the regions best suited to them. Examples include rammed earth (taipa de pilão) in São Paulo, brick masonry in Pernambuco and Bahia, wattle and daub over stone foundations in Minas Gerais due to the rugged terrain, and the widespread use of granite in urban areas and as a structural support and architrave system (akin to the construction methods of ancient Greece) in Rio de Janeiro.

Costa's meticulous study of construction techniques introduced from Portugal to Brazil during the colonial period and his observations regarding the predominance of each technique in Brazilian regions, like their origins, demonstrate his appreciation for the precedent set by colonial popular tradition. His detailed analyses of the techniques and materials employed underscore this valuation.

Costa asserts that indigenous dwellings influenced Brazilian architecture solely in terms of the "program" of early houses—large covered spaces in ranches designed to shelter the many settlers arriving on fleets. Due to their vast size, these roofs were built close to the ground, as seen in sugar mills, differing from those used in metropolitan areas, where larger roofs were divided into smaller sections. These, in turn, bore a resemblance to monumental Indigenous dwellings, given their pure and proportional structures and placement in clearings, like Indigenous settlements. Costa also notes similarities in fire usage between the dwellings of the Trás-os-Montes region and Indigenous homes: to maintain warmth, the kitchen fire was utilised, with smoke escaping through a vent tile or an opening at the ridge of the Indigenous huts.

Costa's observations regarding the evolution of Brazilian houses from colonial popular tradition are reflected in his architectural practice. A notable example is his project for the "Parque Guinle," where he reinterprets the use of verandas, distinguishing between social and service verandas. This concept is further clarified in the following passage:

[...] Hence, the paradoxical contradiction observed in Portugal: the absence of chimneys in the cold northern regions, allowing heat to warm the entire house, versus their prominent presence in the south, where heat is contained solely in the fireplace to prevent it from spreading throughout the house. Indeed, when entering the country through Bragança at dusk one day, I saw, from atop the mountains, the rooftops of the village houses emitting smoke. I then associated this custom with the absence of attached kitchens in the purest surviving examples of seventeenth-century houses in São Paulo, whose rectangular and symmetrical floor plans feature a central hall with a dirt floor and vent tiles, as well as two embedded verandas reminiscent of Palladian loggias: a rear service veranda and a front social veranda, the latter flanked at one end by a chapel and at the other by a small chamber, which, having no direct access to the main house, served as lodging for occasional travellers. In the grand medieval hall stood a long plank table with benches, and it was there, in winter, by the ever-burning fire, that they set up trivets and roasted the day's game or livestock. Interestingly, this scheme was the embryo of the Brazilian rural house—not just the rural house but also suburban dwellings until the late nineteenth century. The latter merely incorporated a service annexe: a dining room at the rear opening onto the domestic veranda and backyard and a front room with a receiving veranda or terrace, connected by a long corridor with bedrooms on either side, ensuring good ventilation in summer. Thus, in a way, everything is interwoven—the Indigenous oca, the Trás-os-Montes house, the so-called 'Bandeirante' house, the plantation house, the suburban house, and the urban neighbourhood house. There is a tendency to view colonial works and pieces as mere imitations of Portuguese originals. However, they are just as legitimate as those in Portugal; for the colonist, *par droit de conquête* was at home, and what he created here—whether similar or already distinct—was precisely what he wished to create. When speaking Portuguese, he did not imitate anyone but simply spoke his language, accent or not (Costa, 1995f, p. 454).

Thus, Costa conducted an in-depth study on using verandas, identifying the presence of domestic or social verandas at the front of houses intended for receiving guests. In contrast, service verandas were located at the back. As previously mentioned, the veranda becomes a key compositional element, stemming from the precedent of colonial popular tradition—an aspect that Costa not only discusses theoretically but also applies in his design practice, reinterpreting it in his architectural solutions, as exemplified in the Parque Guinle project. Costa explains the use of the veranda in the

project's descriptive report. Likewise, a reinterpretation of traditional verandas can be observed in the way he employs pilotis as new verandas, a feature present in projects such as the Casas sem Dono, the Vila Operária in Monlevade, and even the Cidade Universitária.

As previously noted, Costa has aimed to mediate the abrupt social transformations brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Acting as an intermediary in these changes, Costa, while valuing the new architecture—also referred to as modern architecture—refers to precedents derived from erudite and popular traditions. He aims to establish links with the past, acknowledging the importance of architectural evolution. In this sense, he argues that there is no need to break entirely with the past, as it is precisely within architectural precedents that the richness of architectural knowledge resides.

Thus, Costa's writings suggest that precedent is an inexhaustible source of architectural knowledge, provided it is critically interpreted and can serve as a bridge to the new without severing ties with tradition, regardless of its origins. Costa clarifies in his theoretical approach that precedent is fundamental to the architectural creation of excellence, regardless of the period in which one is designing. However, not every precedent is valid, nor is every aspect of it useful for an architect's design practice concerning the present moment.

Accordingly, his writings progressively delineate specific roles for each type of precedent analysed, defining the particular knowledge that can be derived from them. Gradually, Costa clarifies that compositional rules should be extracted from erudite tradition, while the knowledge of compositional elements and architectural components should be drawn from popular tradition. However, in both cases, it is evident that not every precedent serves as a paradigm for extracting such knowledge.

Beyond his concern with reconciling the new and the traditional—aligning with his ideals regarding the principles that constitute architectural excellence—one key question arises: What criteria does Costa establish for distinguishing valid precedents from which knowledge can be extracted, regardless of its intended application? There are indications that his rationale for applying precedent-based knowledge is linked to his concern with mediating a period of profound transformations, easing tensions among professionals who, according to Costa, were "clashing" over architectural discourse. Additionally, his reasoning seems to be shaped by idealistic convictions—namely, the belief that this approach is the most effective way to achieve architectural excellence.

However, this does not fully explain why precedent constitutes the central focus of his theoretical framework for modern architecture. It becomes evident that not all precedents are acceptable: Costa takes a firm stance against those associated with eclecticism and neocolonial styles, arguing that their forms do not directly result from the construction techniques that originated them. Furthermore, in his text "Razões," Costa opposes American and Roman architecture due to their use of construction techniques that differ from the European neoclassical and ancient Greek models they reference while still incorporating their decorative elements. These points suggest that Costa's rationale for precedent may be linked to a genuine interdependence between technology and the resulting architectural form.

"SPHAN"

In the text "SPHAN" (Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional – National Historic and Artistic Heritage Service), included in the book *Registro de uma Vivência*, first published in 1994, Costa asserts that the entire process of transformation brought about by modern architecture was grounded in the renewal of elements from popular tradition that were still deemed relevant—an issue that remained a constant concern for all those involved:

In Brazil, in 1922 and 1936, those engaged in renewal were the same as those committed to 'preservation,' whereas elsewhere, at the time, they were people of opposing backgrounds and stood in contrast. In 1922, while internationally modernising our outdated culture, Mário, Tarsila, Oswald, and others also travelled through the old towns of Minas and the North in an 'anthropophagic' search for our roots. In 1936, the architects who fought for the architectural adaptation to new construction technologies were the same ones who joined Rodrigo M. F. de Andrade in studying and safeguarding the enduring testimony of our authentic past (Costa, 1995e, p. 437).

In this passage, Costa reinforces that modern architecture maintains its ties with tradition, as those involved in studying and preserving the past were the same individuals concerned with architectural renewal. It is evident, therefore, that all the knowledge he acquired through his work at SPHAN was regarded as essential for the foundation of his theoretical and design practice. His interest in critically studying and analysing precedent—particularly concerning architectural and compositional elements that Costa considered highly significant—was closely linked to their association, through traditional popular techniques, with the advancements of reinforced concrete construction.

“Anotações ao correr da lembrança”

The text "Anotações ao Correr da Lembrança", likely derived from Costa's travels with SPHAN, was published in the book *Registro de uma Vivência* (first edition, 1994) and later in *Arquitetura* (first edition, 2002). In this text, Costa describes a variety of materials, presents different technologies, and discusses typologies related to Brazilian houses of the past in various locations, including Pernambuco, Goiás, the Amazon region, Maranhão, Minas Gerais, Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, Espírito Santo, and Rio Grande do Sul. Through this account, Costa highlights both the similarities and differences among the characteristic architectural precedents of each region, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

7 – In the region of Rio de Janeiro, rural architecture flourished—'flourished' being the most appropriate term—featuring verandas supported by Tuscan columns in the style of Minho, yet entirely whitewashed in the manner of Estremadura. The Colubandê estate, with its significant annexed chapel—whose image of Saint Anne is recorded in the Santuário Mariano—stands as, without question, the most graceful and purest example of this style. Debret dedicates plate 42 of his invaluable documentary record to this particular house typology, juxtaposing its floor plan with the scheme of the Roman house—the peristyle, impluvium, and triclinium, or dining room, positioned at the rear, as preserved in our tradition. Similar structures exist in other parts of the country, but not with the same refinement and consistency; generally, they are houses featuring wraparound verandas, as seen in Ceará, for instance, and constructed in a more straightforward manner: cylindrical shafts with virtually no base or capital, and tightly spaced timber rafters, just enough to support a single row of loose roof tiles at a time.

8 – The tile cladding on façades, a hallmark of the 19th century, was common throughout the coastal strip—though entirely absent in Minas Gerais—ranging from Belém and São Luís, where it was most prevalent, to Porto Alegre, where it reached a more elaborate form, with tiles specially designed for pilasters and capitals. In Rio de Janeiro, they were ubiquitous, often accompanied by vases and statuettes adorning parapets and glazed roof ornaments, typically blue or white, along the eaves. Although most of these tiles came from the Santo Antônio factory in Porto, they are now exceedingly rare there, as the city had already been built—virtually everything was sent to Brazil.

9 – Balconies set upon stone corbels in masonry buildings or on cantilevered beams in wattle-and-daub constructions and continuous projecting galleries were typical. Initially, they were safeguarded by sturdy wrought-iron railings, following the Portuguese characteristic of incorporating a horizontal bar at one-third of the balcony's height, with only the end pieces and one or two intermediate vertical elements extending up to the handrail (Costa, 1995a, p. 508).

Costa meticulously examines colonial vernacular tradition concerning both compositional and architectural elements. When referencing Debret's comparison between specific architectural solutions employed in Brazil and Roman architecture, he states:

"Juxtaposing its floor plan with the scheme of the Roman house—the peristyle, impluvium, and triclinium, or dining room, positioned at the rear, as preserved in our tradition."

This passage suggests that Costa highlights a fusion of influences from both erudite and vernacular precedents in shaping Brazilian domestic architecture. He again mentions the avarandado (veranda) as one of the most significant compositional elements derived from colonial vernacular tradition. This observation is particularly noteworthy, as Costa not only analyses this feature but also incorporates it into his architectural practice, as previously discussed.

Regarding architectural elements, Costa describes them as:

"Entirely whitewashed... cylindrical shafts with virtually no base or capital, and tightly spaced timber rafters, just enough to support a single row of loose roof tiles at a time."

Just as with compositional elements, these architectural features were studied, reinterpreted, and integrated into his design practice, as will be further explored later.

Costa's analysis of architectural elements rooted in colonial vernacular tradition concerns materials and construction techniques. His approach seeks to interpret these precedents in their essence rather than merely replicating their stylistic appearance. In contrast, he criticises approaches—such as the Neocolonial and Eclectic styles—which, in his view, reduced architectural elements to superficial aesthetic representations devoid of a more profound rationale. Similarly, when incorporating verandas into his designs, Costa does not simply mimic the spatial configurations of colonial-period floor plans. Instead, he critically interprets these precedents and adapts them to his contemporary context, ensuring continuity with the past while rejecting the uncritical replication of historical models—an approach he staunchly opposed.

The following passage is particularly significant, as Costa explicitly discusses architectural elements derived from colonial vernacular tradition. It reinforces the aforementioned critical approach, in which he examines construction techniques not merely for their aesthetic qualities but for their underlying logic, seeking to understand how these precedents were executed initially and how the knowledge they embody can be meaningfully transferred to the present, incorporating new technologies:

In wattle-and-daub construction, the *cachorro* (projecting beam end) has a slight inclination because it is merely braced internally by a round timber interposed between it and the rafter, which in turn aligns with the cornice that marks the junction between the ceiling and the wall. The entire structural framework is made of wood and is independent of these walls, which serve only as infill—just as in reinforced concrete construction today, where the house rests on its own supporting posts or *pilotis*. This construction method was widely employed across much of the state of Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais, ranging from the refined execution found in rural and urban mansions—such as those in Diamantina, which is almost entirely built of wattle-and-daub—to its more rudimentary form in the dwellings of the poor. Even today, as previously noted in *Documentação Necessária*, one only needs to travel through the countryside to see these structures lining the roadsides. Built with timber from nearby forests and earth from the ground itself, crudely plastered—resembling animal burrows—they provide shelter for entire families: infants, boys, girls, the elderly, all mixed, their faces marked by an air of stagnation, waiting... And no one takes notice, so accustomed they are, for these dwellings belong to the land as much as anthills, wild fig trees, and cornfields—they are the earth continuing (Costa, 1995a, p. 498).

Analysing this passage, it becomes evident that Costa arrives at a striking conclusion: new materials such as reinforced concrete and steel—though offering numerous advantages, including rapid construction, large-span capabilities, and the possibility of high-rise structures—were not the trustworthy source of architectural innovation in terms of independent structural frameworks. While many modernist architects argued that independent structural framing was a novel development enabled solely by these materials, Costa astutely refutes this notion. Through his in-depth study of colonial vernacular construction, he recognises that similar structural principles had already been achieved in traditional building methods. As he states:

"The entire structural framework is made of wood and is independent of these walls, which serve only as infill—just as in reinforced concrete construction today, where the house rests on its own supporting posts, or *pilotis*."

This critical observation leads to an essential point in Costa's architectural thought: modern architecture is, in a sense, inherently traditional—not in terms of materials or technological advancements, but in its fundamental structural principles. Both colonial vernacular techniques and modern reinforced concrete construction share the same essential characteristic: an independent structural framework that allows for open ground floors (pilotis). This realisation forms the core of Costa's argument.

In his 1934 text *Razões da Nova Arquitetura*, Costa mentions erudite tradition, attempting to demonstrate that modern architecture follows the same compositional principles as any architectural precedent considered a paradigm of erudite tradition. In this respect, modern architecture is rigorously traditional—its only distinguishing factor is its formal expression, which is shaped by new technologies. He further argues that, throughout history, the architectural character of each period has been a direct consequence of its construction techniques, which differentiate one style from another. Thus, when critics claim that modern architecture is repetitive on a global scale—labelling it as an "international style"—Costa counters that it is, in fact, merely adhering to architectural tradition, as history demonstrates that styles evolve through repetition. Furthermore, he asserts that the Eclectic style—against which he firmly positioned himself—was one of the most representative expressions of an international style.

Costa clearly connects modern Brazilian architecture and colonial vernacular construction techniques. He argues that modern architecture does not constitute a rupture with tradition but rather represents a continuation of architecture's evolutionary process—whether derived from erudite or vernacular traditions.

“Arquitetura Bioclimática”

The text "Arquitetura Bioclimática", written in 1983, refers to the 70th anniversary of the invention of air conditioning by Willis Havilland Carrier. In this piece, Costa reiterates an observation he had previously made, based on his deep knowledge of vernacular architecture, asserting that technical solutions still considered valid can and should be reapplied in the present through the readaptation of precedents:

It is evident that many of the ingenious ventilation resources used in vernacular or primitive architecture in hot climates—and still applicable from Bahia upwards—would be impractical from the state of Espírito Santo downwards or in inland regions due to the difficulties of sealing, which is necessary for much of the year because of the cold. However, if architects prioritise environmental comfort, it is possible to adapt simple solutions that enable room cross-ventilation. This can be complemented in apartment or office buildings by creating exhaust shafts, including openings at each floor along the elevator shaft and at the entrance of each apartment or office. This ensures the forced circulation of air from the ground floor (pilotis) to the roof, just as occurred in suburban houses of the past century, where long corridors extending from the entrance hall to the dining room—always located at the rear and opening onto the backyard—allowed for the necessary ventilation, even for two rows of bedrooms arranged sequentially along them. It is also essential to promote air circulation between rooms. To achieve this, it is sufficient that particular walls, where they meet orthogonally, do not touch completely, leaving gaps from ceiling to floor sealed with simple pivoting wooden slats with slightly rounded edges, preferably enamelled in colour. Small auxiliary ventilation openings should be incorporated into external and internal walls (Costa, 1995b, p. 239).

According to his own words, Costa attentively observed precedents derived from vernacular traditions of the colonial period, drawing lessons from the great masters of the past to reutilise them in the present. It is important to highlight that this text was written in the 1980s, nearly fifty years after the publication of "Documentação Necessária," the initial text that marked Costa's appreciation for colonial vernacular traditions. In this regard, along with the chronological sequence of the other texts analysed in this article, his consistent perspective on the role of precedent in his architectural conception becomes evident.

FINDINGS AND FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the texts examined in this article, Costa demonstrates that architecture derived from precedents of popular tradition from the colonial period assumes a central role in his theory, as it represents the Brazilian context in its 'essence,' imbued with history and Brazilian architectural culture. Given that Brazil is a young country, architectural styles were still in an early stage during his period of activity, consisting only of colonial architecture alongside eclectic and neocolonial styles. However, Lucio Costa rejects these latter styles, as they lack specific fundamental attributes within his conceptual framework.

The valid precedents, according to Costa's reasoning regarding the possible justifications for tradition, are those in which the primary attribute is the interdependence between technology and plastic form. Only those from the colonial period—from popular tradition—remain in Brazil. As such, these would be the precedents that establish a connection with the place and the country's socio-cultural context, preventing modern architecture from being implemented in a way that is entirely disconnected from its historical and cultural foundations.

In this sense, Costa's thought appears to be based on ideological aspects—on what he believes to be implicit in creating an architecture of excellence—perhaps to value the existing workforce by reviving traditional construction techniques, thereby avoiding drastic ruptures with the past. In this regard, Costa seems to align with a naturalistic tendency, possibly influenced by evolutionary theories.

Thus, other possible reasons behind Costa's mentions of colonial popular tradition lie in the search, through these precedents, for lessons that would complement those derived from the learned tradition to create links or connections. In the case of colonial popular tradition, it is evident from his writings that Costa values the knowledge of its compositional and architectural elements. Since these precedents originate from a popular tradition, extracting explicit compositional laws or principles from them is impossible, as they were created unconsciously. In this case, Costa derives such principles from precedents of classical-academic learned tradition, considering them inherent to professional architectural education.

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