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MULTILATERAL
DIALOGUES
PRAXIS
INTERLOCUTIONS
CONFRONTATIONS

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MULTILATERAL DIALOGUES: PRAXIS, INTERLOCUTIONS, AND CONFRONTATIONS DIÁLOGOS MULTILATERAIS: PRÁXIS, INTERLOCUÇÕES E CONFRONTAÇÕES DIÁLOGOS MULTILATERALES: PRAXIS, INTERLOCUCIONES Y CONFRONTACIONES

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Abstract

This article discusses the processes of re-signifying everyday life through Art and Architecture. It aims to demonstrate that the convergence between disciplinary fields occurs primarily through the recognition of shared values and worldviews, rather than through technical-poetic strategies. The methodology employed involved field research (direct source), access to primary documents (documentary research), and a literature review. *Author Unknown* begins with the reading of an artistic and architectural work, attentive to its praxis and confrontations. Rochelle Costi displaces trivial objects, activating readings of place and memory. The project for the *União Continental* building, carried out by the architectural office MMBB in São Paulo, Brazil, values the ordinary and the preexisting. Rather than treating what exists as a datum to be preserved or surpassed, the cases analysed reveal modes of operation that enchant the banal and make visible the layers of experience that inhabit urban spaces. The text invites careful observation of what tends to remain at the margins, countering the logic of the tabula rasa and the emphasis on the exceptional, in dialogue with Georges Perec, Nicolas Bourriaud, and Walter Benjamin.

Key-words: Art and Architecture, Contemporary Intervention, Re-signification of Everyday Life, Habitual Life.

1 Introduction

What could a plate of food and a building possibly have in common? At first glance, nothing! However, if the analysis is driven by the intrinsic reasons embedded in the thinking that engenders the work, then it could be everything¹. This essay sets into dialogue the work of Rochelle Costi — specifically the exhibition on view during the preparation of this text, titled *A casa como laboratório* (The House as Laboratory), curated by Alexia Tala at *Galeria Luciana Brito*, in São Paulo, Brazil, in 2025 — and the transformation of the *União Continental* office building into housing units carried out by MMBB Architects, also in the city of São Paulo, in 2022. This text is dedicated to two works from two disciplinary fields that act upon and investigate the productions of the city: one within the sphere of intangible culture (everyday food) and the other within the material sphere (constructions, including those rendered invisible in the field's historiography), each with its own dynamics and reverberations. In alignment with the challenge proposed in the call for this issue of the journal, the text articulates differences and convergences between the two works through the simultaneous construction of reflection and action, aiming at the production of knowledge and social transformation.

The interest lies in the attention to the mobilization of banal, non-spectacular objects, summoned precisely because they constitute the ordinary fabric of the world — the everyday. The analysis draws on clues offered by Georges Perec in the text *¿Aproximaciones a qué?*, published in the collection *Lo extraordinario* (Perec, 2013). Nicolas Bourriaud, in his book *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* (Bourriaud, 2009), provides a basis for thinking of editing and montage as the foundation of artistic procedures and, in this text, architectural ones as well. Finally, the text recuperates the moment of hegemonic conviction in the tabula rasa through Walter Benjamin's *Experience and Poverty*, written in 1933. Bringing together authors from distinct intellectual traditions and eras responds to an interest in what they share as a common value — in this case, experience and montage based on preexisting data as a cultural trait to be acknowledged.

This text aims to demonstrate the convergence between disciplinary fields that occur primarily through shared values and worldviews, which are recognizable in the works through poetic strategies that distinguish them as areas of knowledge. The methodology employed involved field research (direct sources through interviews and visits to the exhibition and to the building), access to primary documents (documentary research, including restricted-process records of the architectural project), and a literature review. The analysis is structured from the works themselves; that is, it begins with the empirical

¹ The connection between artist(s) and architect(s) through their worldview rather than their disciplinary field was originally explored by Marta Bogéa in the exhibition she co-curated with Abílio Guerra, entitled *Territory of Contact*, which took place in 2012 at SESC Pompéia.

before the theoretical. In other words, it is first based on data and observations — the results of experience and practice — and only then turns to the concepts, ideas, and abstractions that seek to explain the world.

2 Prato Feito (Set Meal)

Grão de arroz tem 8 cm no Arte/Cidade 3 (A grain of rice is 8 cm in Arte/Cidade 3) is the title of the article written by Celso Fioravante for the +MAIS! supplement of the newspaper *Folha de S.Paulo*, published on Sunday, October 26, 1997². The informational box reads:

Event: Arte/Cidade 3 (urban intervention project)
Where: route between Estação da Luz, in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, and the former Matarazzo factories (entrance and parking at Av. Francisco Matarazzo, 1,096), with access from both locations and a stop at Moinho Central
When: Tuesday to Sunday, from 12 p.m. to 9 p.m.; until November 30
How much: free admission (Fioravante, 1997, n.p., our translation)



Fig. 1: Pratos Típicos: Prato Feito (1997). Source: Rochelle Costi, 1997. Available at: <https://rochellecosti.com/Pratos-tipicos-1997-1>. Accessed on 10/06/2025.

² Fernando de Mello Franco and Milton Braga participated as invited architects in the same event, carrying out an earthmoving intervention in front of the main entrance of the former Matarazzo factories, located in the city of São Paulo, Brazil.

The article refers to Rochelle Costi's photographs from the series *Pratos Típicos* (typical food), produced between 1994 and 1997 — the year of the exhibition. At *Arte/Cidade*, four photographs depicting meals from the region were displayed; they were enlarged, printed on vinyl using a plotter as advertising-style images, and installed in the openings that once held windows on the top floor of the building. *Pratos Típicos: Familiar (Familiar)*; *Pratos Típicos: Prato Feito (Set meal)*; *Pratos Típicos: Sem Teto (Homeless)*; *Pratos Típicos: Marmita (Packed lunch)*. Figure 1 presents *Prato Típico: Prato Feito*. In the text written by the artist and available on her website:

Plates of food belonging to residents living around the former mill are photographed and enlarged at a scale and in a medium that evoke advertising billboards, and are displayed inside the factory that, decades earlier, had produced a large portion of the flour consumed in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. The identity of the surrounding population is revealed through the worker's *marmita* (home-packed meal carried in a lunchbox), the improvised lunch of a group of unhoused residents, the *buchada* served in the Tuesday *prato feito* (common Brazilian set meal) at a corner bar in the Barra Funda district of São Paulo, and the fried fish prepared by a family. The mill, decommissioned in the 1990s, was gradually informally occupied, forming what is today the *Favela do Moinho*; the actions of the public authorities were limited to demolishing the old factory and promising the settlement's disappearance. (Costi, 1997, n.p., our translation)

Costi produced the *Pratos Típicos* series at the same time that she created *Toalhas* (towels). In an interview with Ivo Mesquita, she reveals:

Pratos Típicos and *Toalhas* took place during my time at the space *A Casa*. When I was invited to the Havana Biennial, I was immersed in domestic rituals—in the repetition of habits that choreograph the intimacy of bodies around the table, the bed, the clothesline, in an arranging and rearranging of countless frequency. (Costi, 2005, n.p., our translation)

Both series are part of a quotidian intrinsic to habitual life—facts that often arise from ordinary situations, occurring in banal places, yet constituting an intrinsic part of memory insofar as their materiality shelters forms of coexistence, places, and events that become inseparable in recollection. (Almeida & Bogéa, 2016) Food is undoubtedly one of these elements. Architecture, even when banal, is another. Costi describes the installation at the former mills, presented in Figure 2:

The event had “the city and its histories” as its theme, and I was drawn to the idea of speaking about the history of food among the inhabitants living near the ruins of an old mill in São Paulo, Brazil. I therefore photographed a sampling of four types of food: a worker's *marmita* (home-packed meal), a set meal, a family's food, and a group of unhoused people's food. The enlarged images, printed on 2.5 × 3.10 m plotters, occupied a 30-meter room on the top floor of the building. Placed between the openings of large windows, they proposed a dialogue with the city, in counterpoint to advertising backlights. (Costi, 2005, n.p., our translation)



Fig. 2: *Pratos Típicos* installation at *Arte/Cidade II, Moinho Central*, Barra Funda, São Paulo, SP, Brazil. Source: Rochelle Costi, 1997. Available at: <https://rochellecosti.com/Pratos-tipicos-1997-1>. Accessed on 10/06/2025.

The artist told the reporter that the most significant difficulty in her project was persuading people to allow their plates to be photographed. Was it really shyness, as the photographer interpreted? Or was it astonishment in the face of interest in such a banal, everyday, and deeply personal element — something that “would not matter to anyone”? Such discourse appears in the words of a resident of Croix-Rousse, in the city of Lyon, France, when speaking about memories of her neighborhood in an interview given to Pierre Mayol, cited by Michel de Certeau (1994) in *The Practice of Everyday Life, Book 1: Arts of Doing*, in the significantly titled section *Credible and Memorable: Habitability*.

3 Ordinary Things

The interest in revisiting existing things is also significant in architecture. An issue inherent to certain artists and architects, it corresponds to a fundamental and ongoing theme. In the disciplinary field of architecture, it dates back — within contemporary terms — to the emblematic example of the transformation project carried out in the *17th arrondissement* of Paris, France: *Tour Bois-le-Prêtre*, by Druot, Lacaton, and Vassal (2011). However, this understanding differs from what is stated by the jury of the Pritzker Prize awarded to them in 2021, which declares that they “find value in what already exists (...) in order to give renewed potential to what already existed” (Pritzker Prize, 2021, n.p.). In this case, above all, what is recognized is that, in discerning the potential of what existed, they intervene by transforming it precisely through the introduction of something that did not exist. It is not, therefore, a matter of acknowledging the given with minimal interference, but of the careful judgment of what is present and what is absent — an evaluation that enables them to intervene, transform, shift, and valorize in order to re-signify.

The image of the DJ evoked by Nicolas Bourriaud (2009) in *Postproduction Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* is an apt one for analyzing these productions. The author explains the adoption of the technical term, used in television, film, and video productions: “It designates the set of treatments applied to recorded material: editing, the addition of other

visual or sound sources, subtitles, voice-overs, special effects.” (Bourriaud, 2009, p. 7, our translation) He notes that this operation is connected to the tertiary sector—the world of services and recycling—as opposed to sectors dealing with the production of raw materials. The author identifies, starting in the 1990s, an increasing number of artists interpreting, exhibiting, or using available cultural products or works made by others. Bourriaud clarifies:

For them, the task is not to elaborate a form from raw material, but rather to work with current objects already circulating in the cultural market—that is, objects that already possess a form given by someone else. Thus, the notions of originality (being at the origin of...) and even of creation (making from nothing) fade in this new cultural landscape marked by the twin figures of the DJ and the programmer, whose tasks consist of selecting cultural objects and inserting them into defined contexts. (Bourriaud, 2009, p. 9, our translation)

The author does not confine his analysis to architecture; his focus is on artistic practices. Yet the argument is equally powerful in architecture, provided that the unequivocal differences between the fields are maintained—for example, the non-portability of data from one place to another in the case of architecture as material. The operation generally occurs between two (or more) moments, beginning from an existing artifact. Returning to Walter Benjamin (1994) in the text *Experience and Poverty*, written in 1933, allows us to trace the origins of what has led us to opt for a point zero at each new action. The text opens with the observation that “experience has fallen in value, and this in a generation that between 1914 and 1918 had one of the most monstrous experiences in human history” (p. 114, our translation). The philosopher notes that a new form of poverty emerged with the monstrous development of technology, which came to overshadow human beings. He asks: “What is the value of all our cultural heritage if the experience no longer relates to us?” (p. 114, our translation). He sees the emergence of a new barbarism. In his words: “What does this poverty of experience yield for the barbarian? It drives him to begin from the beginning, to make a fresh start, to be satisfied with little (...)” (Benjamin, 1994, pp. 114–115, our translation). The author observes the aspiration to free oneself from all experience, stressing that those who defend or enact this condition are not necessarily ignorant or inexperienced: “We may say that the reverse holds true: they ‘devour’ everything, ‘culture’ and ‘people,’ and are left satiated and exhausted” (p. 119, our translation). This trait, according to him, spans from high culture—for example, the Bauhaus — to popular culture — for example, Mickey Mouse. The author concludes that we have become poor, because:

We have abandoned one after another all the pieces of human heritage; many times we had to pawn them for a hundredth of their value in exchange for the small change of the ‘present.’ The economic crisis stands at the door; behind it lies a shadow—the next war. (...) In its buildings, paintings, and stories, humanity prepares itself, if necessary, to survive culture. And what is most important: it does so laughing. Perhaps this laughter has here and there a barbaric sound. Perfect. In the meantime, may the individual give a bit of humanity to that mass, which one day may perhaps repay it with interest—and with compound interest. (Benjamin, 1994, p. 119, our translation)

Acerbic in his forceful critique, Benjamin (1994) points out, with lucid disquiet, the delirious project of his time that drives people to move forward and, if necessary, to survive culture itself. A delirium that so exceeds its own moment that it can still be observed in certain hegemonic practices today. The text was written between the two great world wars of the twentieth century; it is important to recall that it dates from the same year as Hitler’s seizure of power in Germany, which marked the beginning of the Third Reich. Nearly a century later, it remains relevant³. It is worth considering the challenge of not relinquishing personal and collective experience, in the terms proposed by the architect Milton Braga:

Many people think a house must be personalized, and we do not disagree. As Fernando [*de Mello Franco, founding partner of MMBB until 2012*] and I used to say, a house is personalized not by the architecture—which is infrastructural—but by the reliquary, that which each person carries with them: their photos, their paintings, their rugs, their curtains, their clothes. That is what changes

³ A rather unsettling fact, considering the rise of the far right around the world in recent decades. Walter Benjamin, a German-Jewish philosopher and sociologist, lived in exile in Italy between 1934 and 1935 and died in Spain in 1940 at the age of 48.

completely from one person to another and completely transforms a house (...). (Braga, 2024, n.p., our addition, our translation)

In this sense, it is important to observe how Frédéric Druot, Anne Lacaton, and Jean-Philippe Vassal (2011) document the aforementioned project in the 17th *arrondissement* of Paris, France. Through the revealing photographs by Philippe Ruault, which show several of the apartments in their personal states of occupation, one sees a balcony filled with orchids or, in another unit, carnival masks displayed on the wall. From these photographs, one can recognize each “reliquary,” in the terms used by Franco and Braga (2024), distinguishing each dwelling. The photographs, in recording the architecture, also allow glimpses of the people who live there. Similarly, Rochelle Costi’s series *Quartos* (1998) portrays traces of those who inhabit the place, allowing the architecture that shelters them to be perceived. Some photographs from *Quartos* are included in the artist’s current exhibition at *Galeria Luciana Brito*, in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, at the time of writing this text. The series was initially presented at the 24th Bienal de São Paulo, in 1998, and arranged as a set of different frontal views, accentuating the singularity of each room photographed, as can be seen in Figure 3.

Alexia Tala, curator of the exhibition titled *A casa como laboratório*⁴ (The House as Laboratory), brings Costi’s work into dialogue with Georges Perec in her text *The House as a Laboratory of Wonder: The Infraordinary and the Construction of Dwelling in the Work of Rochelle Costi*. According to her:

In his brief text *Aproximaciones a lo infraordinario*, Perec asks: “What happens when nothing happens? How can we speak of those hours, those days in which nothing takes place, when nothing occurs beyond what happens every day — the habitual, the everyday, the evident, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the everydayness of life?” For Perec, the infraordinary is what constitutes the real fabric of our lives: not significant events, but the murmur of the habitual, the trace of the minimal.” (Tala, 2025, p. 1, our translation)

Through Perec, the curator understands Rochelle Costi as

(...) an artist of the infraordinary. Throughout her long and productive career, she avoided spectacular themes or grandiloquent settings, preferring instead to explore bedrooms, furniture, closets, ordinary objects, forgotten corners, insects, walls, patterns, textures, shops selling inexpensive items, and even market stalls. (Tala, 2025, p. 5, our translation)

⁴ Rochelle Costi’s exhibition *A casa como laboratório* (The House as Laboratory), at Galeria Luciana Brito, from June to August 2025.



Fig. 3: *Quartos* installation at the 24th Bienal de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil. Source: Rochelle Costi, 1998. Available at: <https://rochellecosti.com/Quartos-Sao-Paulo-1998>. Accessed on 10/06/2025.

In *¿Aproximaciones a qué?*, Georges Perec (2013) opens the text by observing that “What speaks to us, it seems to me, is always the event, the unusual, the extraordinary: the front page spread across five columns, the big headlines.”⁵ (p. 13, our translation). He warns that the news prioritizes what is dramatic and unsettling. According to him, behind every event there must always be a scandal or a danger, as if life should only reveal itself through the spectacular. Faced with this, the author asks:

Newspapers speak of everything except the everyday. Newspapers bore me; they teach me nothing; what they report does not concern me, does not question me, and, moreover, does not respond to the questions I ask or would like to ask. What really happens, what we live, the rest — all the rest — where is it? How can we account for what happens every day and what happens again, for the banal, the everyday, the evident, the common, the ordinary, the infraordinary, the background noise,

⁵ From the original in Spanish: “Lo que nos habla, me parece, es siempre el acontecimiento, lo insólito, lo extraordinario: la primera página a cinco columnas, grande titulares” (Perec, 2013, p. 13).

the habitual? How can we interrogate it? How can we describe it? (Perec, 2013, p. 14, our translation)⁶

Aligned with Perec (2013), we return here to architecture and to the production of the city of São Paulo, Brazil. We revisit a text by Luis Espallargas Gimenez (1993), published in *Revista Óculum* (prior to the current digital archives), titled *Small Architecture: When Simplicity and Correctness Replace Genius*. In this essay, Gimenez draws attention to the “spectacularization” of architecture at the end of the millennium. According to the author, this phenomenon compelled architects “to design under the obligation to invent, to provoke, even to mesmerize — not a single observer, but a crowd so uninformed and alienated that it only reacts and admits stimulation when shocked or subjected to exaggeration” (2009, p. 72, our translation), echoing through a catalog of examples that confirms this ideology. The author warns that, as a consequence, the architect “disdains the simple, economical, efficient, and correct artifact, for it no longer seems plausible to believe that a concise and discreet conception may be timely or endowed with significant aesthetic qualities, hence the disregard for this architecture seen as ‘small’” (2009, p. 72, our translation). This argument returns with a precise framing and renewed attention to housing buildings, in dialogue with the publication *On the Judgment of São Paulo Architecture* (2009), Vitruvius portal, Arquitectos magazine.

4 Intervening, Transforming

A recent municipal law in São Paulo, Brazil, also affects the built heritage, regardless of a property's cultural or historical value. To make use of the neglected building stock, the Requalifica Centro Program — Municipal Law No. 17,577, enacted on July 20, 2021 — promotes densification in the central area, offering a series of benefits to projects that convert underutilized existing buildings into housing units. Among the main incentives⁷ are exemption from the property tax (IPTU) during the first three years after completion of the works, the waiver of compliance with parking requirements, and the elimination of the active façade requirement, among other benefits.

This shift in orientation redirects the focus of earlier rehabilitation programs from the 1990s and 2000s — which were primarily aimed at monumental buildings and at creating cultural facilities for tourism purposes (Marins, 2017) — toward buildings of everyday heritage, those more closely tied to daily life. This not only signals a change in relation to previous policies, valuing the presence of ordinary uses in the city center, but also highlights an interest in reusing the extensive built stock that had been emptied in recent decades as the city expanded into new axes of real estate valorization⁸ (Sant’Anna, 2017). In this sense, it aligns with the protection of a built inventory that extends beyond the monumental. This change in legislation, informally called the *Retrofit Law*⁹, established new instruments to encourage the rehabilitation of buildings in the city center, marking an important departure from the exhausting practice of simply starting anew. This practice unfortunately remains prevalent in São Paulo.

The legal stance supporting investments in existing buildings — regardless of whether they are recognized as heritage — aligns with the central issue of the doctoral dissertation *Renovation Is Not Construction: The Rehabilitation of High-Rise*

⁶ From the original in Spanish: “Los diarios hablan de todo, salvo lo diario. Los diarios me aburren, no me enseñan nada; lo que cuentan no me concierne, no me interroga y además no responde a las preguntas que planteo o que quisiera plantear. Lo que pasa realmente, lo que vivimos, lo demás, todo lo demás, ¿dónde está? ¿Cómo dar cuenta de lo que pasa cada día y de lo que vuelve a pasar, de lo banal, lo cotidiano, lo evidente, lo común, lo ordinario, lo infraordinario, el ruido de fondo, lo habitual? ¿Cómo interrogarlo? ¿Cómo describirlo?” (Perec, 2013, p. 14)

⁷ Full tax incentives: Remission of outstanding property tax (IPTU) debts; Exemption from IPTU during the first 3 years following the issuance of the certificate of completion of works; Application of progressive IPTU rates for a period of 5 years after the exemption described above. In the 6th year, the property reaches the full tax rate; Reduction of the services tax (ISS) rate to 2% for services related to the requalification work (engineering, architecture, construction, cleaning, maintenance, environment); Exemption from the property transfer tax (ITBI) for properties undergoing requalification; Exemption from municipal fees for installation and operation for 5 years. — Requalifica Centro Program (Law No. 17,577/21).

⁸ The emptying of functions in the city center of São Paulo, Brazil — particularly in office buildings — began as early as the 1960s, when economic and financial centers migrated to new areas such as Avenida Paulista, Avenida Faria Lima, and later the region of Avenida Berrini.

⁹ *Requalifica Centro* Program (Lei 17.577/21).

Buildings and New Ways of Living in São Paulo in the 21st Century, by Alejandra Maria Devecchi, supervised by Maria Ruth Amaral de Sampaio and defended in 2010 (Devecchi, 2014). It also directly challenges the still-dominant practice of wholly replacing tall buildings with entirely new built volumes. The market's response to the legislation is already underway, and currently involves a significant number of investments in preexisting buildings. Somauma Inc., for example, states on its website:

We develop and construct projects that renovate empty, abandoned, or underutilized buildings, opening the doors to new opportunities for life in the city! We incorporate retrofit into its original conception. Much more than a simple renovation, it consists of producing a new property—new in all its systems and guarantees, but also new in its urban meaning. (Somauma, n.d., n.p., our translation)

Among the projects presented in the catalog is the Virgínia Building, located at the corner of *Martins Fontes* Street and *Álvares de Carvalho* Street, in the center of São Paulo. It was approved in September 2023, with construction scheduled for completion in September 2025. The project, authored by *Metrópole* Architects (2024), stands out for the preservation and enhancement of the preexisting aesthetic elements, even though heritage preservation agencies do not formally list the building. Another agent in this market-driven transformation is the developer Planta Inc., whose presentation reads:

With a focus entirely on retrofit, Planta Inc. seeks to attract residents to central areas in a rational, environmentally friendly way, thereby contributing to a city with more equal access to opportunities. (Planta Inc., n.d., n.p., our translation)

In the available catalog, buildings such as the Renata Sampaio Ferreira Building are listed — a modernist building designed by Oswaldo Bratke in 1956, located at the corner of *Major Sertório* Street and *Araújo* Street, also in the center of São Paulo. In a project by METRO Architects (2024), its commercial floor slabs were reconfigured to accommodate ninety-three apartments, while maintaining preexisting elements of the landmarked façade, such as the symbolic *cobogós*. The work was completed in October 2023 making it the first building to receive an occupancy permit under the program. The same catalog includes the *União Continental* Building, a renovation project developed by MMBB Architects in 2022. This project differs from the others by requalifying an ordinary building described as being of “unknown authorship,” as indicated in the technical sheet available on the firm's website. What is of interest here, above all, is the transformation of an everyday, unremarkable building — one without any apparent singularity that might distinguish it from the typical production of its time (Figure 4).



Fig. 4: *União Continental* Building before the intervention. Survey photograph. Source: MMBB Architects, 2020.

In the project brief available on the website of MMBB Architects (2022), the authors state:

União Continental is a characteristic example of the anonymous modern architecture of the mid-twentieth century (sic), predominant in the center of São Paulo, Brazil, and responsible for transforming this real-estate stock into one of the most prominent modernist ensembles in the world. Regardless of its quality and global relevance, the modernity of São Paulo's historic core is one of the most striking aspects of the city's urbanization, making the importance of its preservation unquestionable. Therefore, the appreciation of the building's modern features was one of the project's fundamental premises. (MMBB Arquitetos, 2022, n.p., our translation)

Milton Braga analyzes the building, pointing to the guiding principle of the project, recognizable in Figure 5:

União Continental is a magnificent building to recycle, because it has no central column. It is small, but it has large spans, so you can do whatever you want inside. At the same time, because it was a service building, designed for work, it was not as committed to natural light everywhere (...) its floor plates are very deep. And so the only viable typology is that of the small apartment, with few occupants, in which spaces can be completely integrated. Thus, in the same window, you can have

sleeping, eating, or working, cleaning the house, cooking, and so on. (Braga, 2024, n.p., our translation)

The architects describe aspects of the transformation — which they refer to as a recycling project — while intentionally distancing themselves from the term retrofit, used by the developer Planta Inc. in accordance with current real-estate market terminology. This difference in terminology is not trivial: one emphasizes the procedure; the other, the commodity. Braga observes:

Today, there is increasing attention to the recycling of buildings. This is the term I have used in place of retrofit, which is the more common jargon. It makes us think about new buildings being designed now, and how they will be recycled in the future. Today, more than ever, we are aware that every project must also be conceived for its future recycling, and eventually its re-signification. I believe that the great challenge of contemporary architecture is to make something that can be recycled or transformed, but that at the same time does not degenerate and, if possible, retains something of its origin, so that history is not lost. (Braga, 2024, n.p., our translation)

While recycling refers to the process of transforming waste — in this case, obsolete built matter — the term retrofit, adopted by the real-estate market, signals a focus primarily on the enhancement of functional improvements and the updating of systems and infrastructure to meet the parameters and requirements of contemporary efficiency standards (Powell, 1999). Even when some architectural features are preserved and valued, the focus of retrofit is not on valuing or re-signifying the preexisting material, but rather on improving the product.

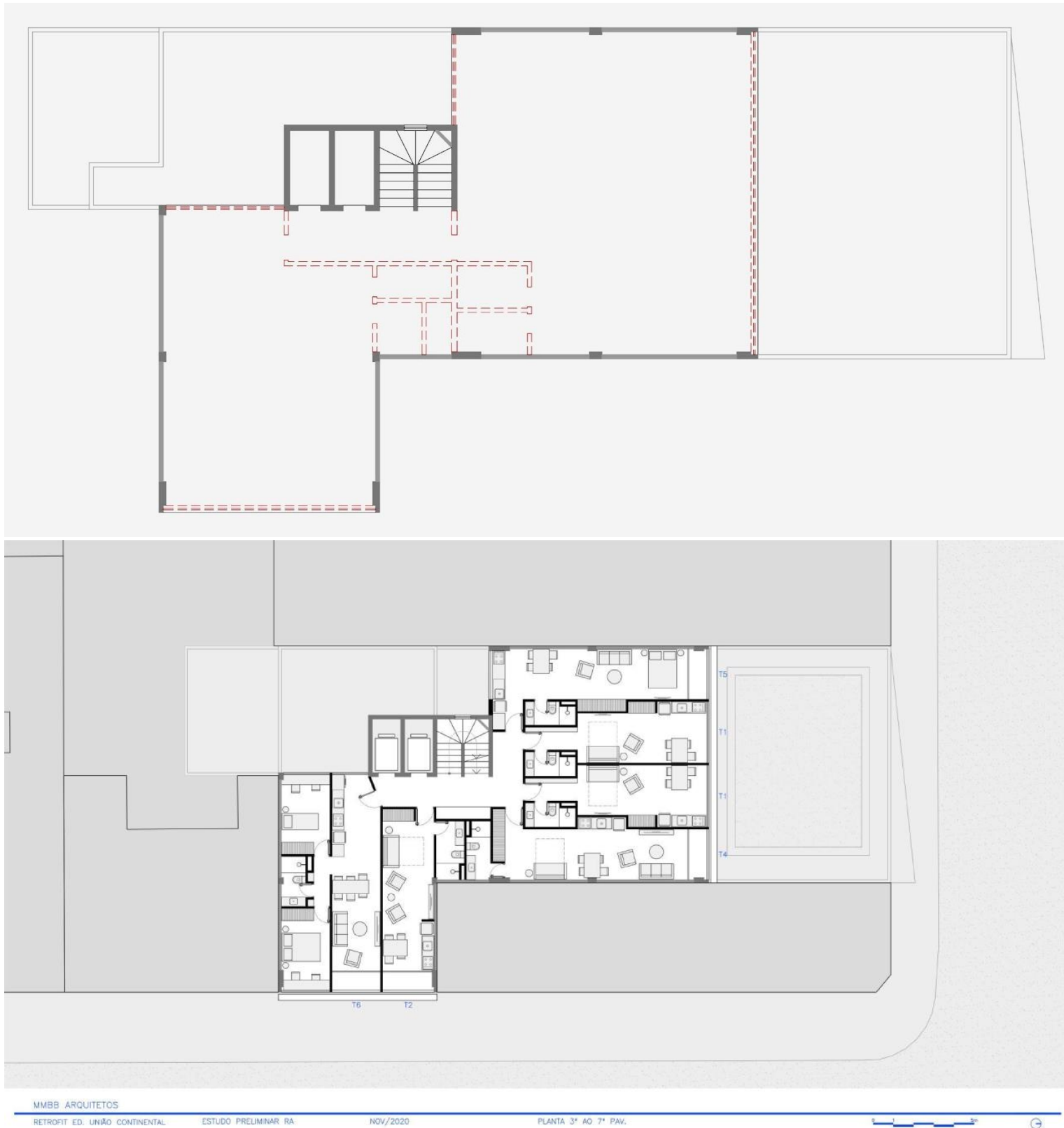


Fig. 5: União Continental Building, typical floor plan: to retain/demolish and intervention. Source: MMBB Architects, 2020.

The *União Continental* Building received its first occupancy authorization upon completion of construction in 1973. According to records obtained from the Municipal Archive of the city of São Paulo¹⁰, Brazil, the original project dates back to 1963 and was developed by Sorenc Engineering for the owner Luiz Vicente Barros Mattos. In 1966, the property was transferred to BARMA Inc., and a modification project was submitted. In 1973, the occupancy permit was issued along with the final inspection report. In the drawings held at the Municipal Archive, the official stamp identifies the project's author: Eng. Ulysses Pasqual. Because he is not an author repeatedly recognized for his architectural production, his name ultimately disappeared from contemporary records. It is relevant to observe how the authors of this ordinary, everyday city vanish from the field's historiography, even when the quality of what they were capable of producing is acknowledged:

We preserved that architecture, even though it is neither listed nor particularly notable; we made use of what already existed. The light is somewhat diffuse, distributed through several windows, so we created floor-to-ceiling windows. There are all the ribs of the structure, which we ended up exposing, because it is very well-made concrete for its time. (...) concrete that was not intended to be exposed, and which we chose to reveal. (MMBB Arquitetos, 2022, n.p., our translation)

There is a condition not mentioned in the architects' records that warrants attention: the corner features a small structure with a fiber-cement roof and graffiti on its façades, as shown in Figure 7.



Fig. 7: Corner of *Marquês de Itu* Street and *Rego Freitas* Street, São Paulo, Brazil. Source: Mariana Lunardi Vetrone, 2024.

¹⁰ Research of project records conducted at the Municipal Public Archive of São Paulo, Brazil, in January 2025.

Noisy — both in scale and in appearance compared with the building that frames it—the small structure is consistently kept out of focus in the project’s presentation drawings. Within the terms of this analysis, however, it is valuable precisely because it exists as it is. A curious contradiction emerges between modes of documentation and representation and the convictions already assumed, at least by one of its authors, Milton Braga (2024):

Traditional cities worked with what was already there or with what was available, like the *bricoleur*¹¹. And I think that the view of the city is still this: the city is a process; whether we like it or not, we will have to incorporate things that are not ideal. But perhaps this is, at heart, the ideal of the city—the correct view of the city. Moreover, it is more beautiful this way, isn’t it? As Colin Rowe argues in the text¹². (Braga, 2024, n.p., our translation)

A previously unseen aspect redefines the building's perception within the landscape: its chromatic planes. Located in the *Vila Buarque* neighborhood, at the intersection of Marquês de Itu Street and Rego Freitas Street in the center of São Paulo, the architects emphasize its “L” configuration, which gives it two street façades — an evident distinction in Figure 8:

This double frontage, together with the profusion of party walls that result from it, inspired a color composition that highlights this geometry as a virtue. (...) those who walk along *Rego Freitas* Street always encounter a burgundy tone, while along *Marquês de Itu* Street, a light blue stands out. Two streets, two colors, two distinct presences. At the corner, where the colors meet, a third appearance emerges, the result of the combination of burgundy and light blue, which accentuates the building’s peculiar condition in the city. (MMBB Arquitetos, 2022, n.p., our translation)

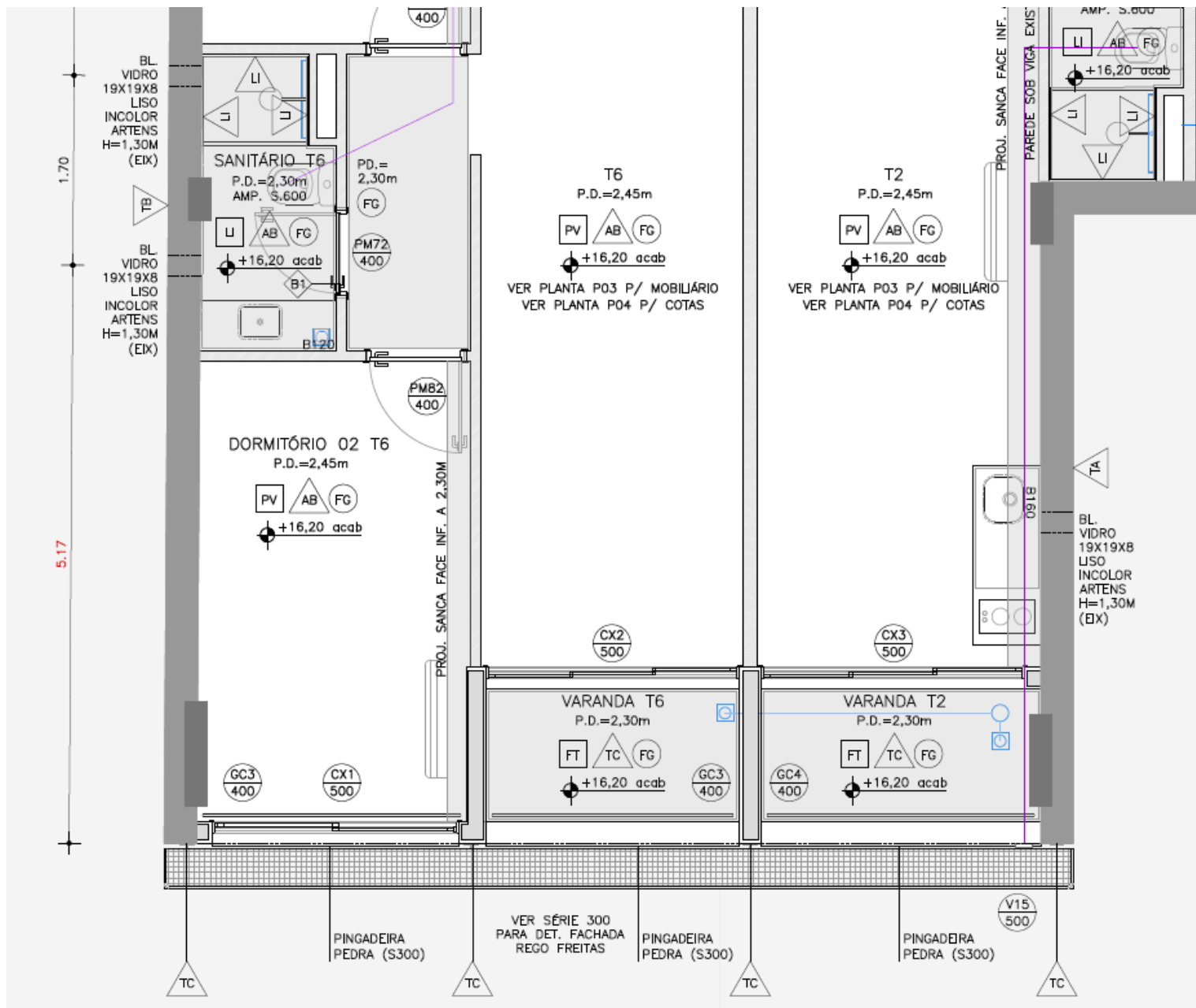
¹¹ Term used by Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter (1978) to refer to the individual who engages in “bricolage” in the traditional city.

¹² The architect is referring to the work *Collage City* by Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter (1978).



Fig. 8: Renovated building within the urban landscape. Source: Israel Gollino / Planta Inc., 2024.

The project is rich in delicate and carefully considered details. For example, to reduce the lack of natural light at the depth of the floor plate — which reaches up to 11 meters in some cases — a glass block and an elegant enclosure are inserted to bring in light. Three on one façade, two on another, and one on the smallest façade. This pattern produces a kind of pointillism on the façades, certainly more visible at night when illuminated from within. In the published drawings, these details do not appear; they are present only in the construction documents, shown in Figure 9. However, this aspect is perceptible on the façades when closely observed in photographs of the built work.



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Fig. 9: Detail from the construction documents showing the insertion of glass blocks in the building's party walls. Source: MMBB Architects, 2022.

5 Final Considerations

Rochelle Costi and Milton Braga, in co-authorship with Marta Moreira and Maria João Figueiredo, even while working through distinct poetic languages, share a common value: they know how to mobilize the habitual in ways that restore attention to what has been treated as banal. They know how to re-enchant the world by allowing themselves to pause, to look closely, and to work with what is already there. Without prior judgment and without diminishing existing values, they act with the freedom to construct value beyond what already exists. Through their gazes, the bases thus altered acquires new potency.

The case studies presented here belong to a topic of longstanding interest. They bring to it, however, a renewed freshness by drawing upon this attention to the everyday banal in the face of contemporary challenges, among them the need to counter a still-prevalent practice of demolition/reconstruction within the disciplinary field of architecture. The *União Continental* Building makes visible a common practice in the ordinary construction of the city — though less common in formal architectural production — of valuing the continued existence of an ordinary building. By intervening in its entirety, rather than in one or another unit, the project aligns itself with the urgent conviction that renovating is better than demolishing/building anew — a local action that engages with an international commitment.

It is valuable to observe that, although indifferent to the name of the building's author, the architects do not overlook the quality of the built work. Might this indicate a renewed attunement within the disciplinary field of architecture? One hopes so — at least in the careful analysis and appreciation of the artifact itself. Although the practice of reconstruction has always been part of the making of places, the reasons and interests at stake today are current and generate renewed forms of knowledge through transformation. This action allows for the valuation of memory and of invisibilized heritage, revealed through architectural and urban design interventions.

Bringing it into dialogue with *Pratos Feitos* arises from the interest in fostering exchanges — between distinct fields of practice, though in permanent contact. Both works, each in its own field, operate as practices. This association also confirmed the initial hypothesis, the objective of the analysis: what allows these two works — in the visual arts and architecture — to be brought together is the set of values they mobilize, rather than the poetic domains that engender them. Their value lies in the way they look in order to re-signify, to intervene, to invent, and no longer in the stable recognition of what is already there. They undertake the sophisticated and difficult task of enchanting so that they may re-enchant the world — estranging and inventing from what was found, without simply accepting it. They make the world turn without annihilating the time made perceptible through things. They lead us to recognize what Perec (2013) warned about when dedicating attention to common things, to what already exists, to what we are.

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