

White Walls, Ideological Margins: Revolution and Identity in Italian-Lusitanian Architectural Dialogues

Tendenza, Post-1974 Portuguese Architecture, Casabella Continuità, Ernesto Nathan Rogers, Álvaro Siza'

/Abstract

This article examines the exchanges between Italy and Portugal until the 1970s, demonstrating how Italian architectural culture informed, though not entirely determined, Portuguese project culture during and after the Estado Novo. Drawing on Portuguese journals, archives and built works, it identifies distinct phases of reception: the late 1940s engagement with *Casabella* and E. N. Rogers; the 1950s–60s appropriation of neo-rationalist methods; and the post-1974 assimilation of *Tendenza*. Central to this inquiry is the figure of Távora, whose network of Italian interlocutors (Gardella, Albini, Rogers) and dissemination of their discourse through the *Inquérito* (IARP) furnished decisive resources for the emerging Oporto School. The article further reconstructs Siza's early formation, mediated through Távora, Italian publications, and "Italian" readings of Aalto and Loos, tracing how his compositional principles evolved distinctly after the Revolution. Among the archival evidence examined is Silvia Viana de Lima's 1960 translation of Rogers' essay "L'Architettura moderna dopo la generazione dei Maestri," that reveals the depth of Portuguese engagement with Milanese discourse. The article contends that the Oporto School, while deeply indebted to Italian neo-rationalism, synthesized these conceptual instruments with vernacular traditions, late Nordic modernism, and revolutionary imperatives. A disciplinary position shaped by specific conditions: delayed modernization under dictatorship and subsequent post-revolutionary transformation. The study challenges historiographies that assimilate the Oporto School into the narrative of modern movement continuity, arguing that no full modernism took root in Portugal under the Estado Novo. Postwar Portuguese architecture is positioned instead as a belated but consequential "realistic postmodernity", a third way forged through transnational dialogue, in which Italian neo-rationalism played a constitutive rather than incidental role.

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Architect, educator and historian, Gregorio Carboni-Maestri works at the intersection of architectural project history, theory, practice and activism, forging tools to confront the structural crisis of capitalism and its spatial consequences. Born in 1977 and raised across Italy, Brazil, and Belgium, he splits his time between Genoa, Brussels, and Berlin, where his daughter Nehara lives. He studied at La Cambre, the Facoltà d'architettura civile del Politecnico di Milano, and FAUP in Oporto, where he took part in the historic center rehabilitation through the now-defunct CRUARB-CH. Before creating his own practice, he worked at offices such as RPBW, ACPV and Archea. He earned his doctorate in 2015 from the Università di Palermo with a dissertation on the American scene of the 1960s and 70s, under the guidance of Sandro Scarrocchia and Kenneth Frampton. Between 2013 and 2015, he was a visiting research scholar at Columbia University and received a Graham Foundation grant to create and study first-hand the Kenneth Frampton Archives. In 2017, he was appointed post-doctoral visiting research scholar at the CCA. He has since held visiting positions at the Politecnico di Milano (2024), Università di Bergamo (2025), and Université Laval in Québec (2026). He taught history of architecture, cities, and territories at UCLouvain and is currently Premier maître APA teaching architectural studio at La Cambre Horta, ULB. His research centres on the theory of the project and its entanglement with societal and ideological transformations, with particular emphasis on post-war developments and the *Tendenza*. In a period of war, systemic crisis and deepening inequality, he is committed to reclaiming architecture as a discipline that serves the invisibilized majority and the broader 99%.

In the 1930s, under the Estado Novo, Portuguese architectural journals looked to Fascist Italy as a model of modernity aligned with authoritarian values. This admiration was mostly aesthetic. With WWII and Portugal's isolation, the connection faded, leading to editorial stagnation until a renewed interest in Italy emerged in 1948.¹

This second moment—following the editorial connection of the 1930s and early 1940s—displayed new characteristics. Italy was no longer admired solely for its architecture vocabulary. The novelty lay in the interest in its approach—its theoretical and programmatic framework in relation to the city, to publishing, and to the academic world. *Casabella Continuità* and the group of architects associated with it, became an essential point of reference for *Arquitectura*. Added to this was *Arquitectura Portuguesa*'s growing attention to design, furniture, interiors centered on Gio Ponti's *Domus*. Almost everything about Italy captured the interest of nearly everyone, each according to their own vision. Certain figures who had already appeared before the war re-emerged in a new light recognized as intellectuals: no longer simply designers, but individuals endowed with theoretical, political, and a social vision. They carried and echoed an architecture born of the Resistance - a voice of the newly established Italian Republic, born of a civil war and a partisan revolution.

In 1948 that love story between Portuguese and Italian architecture—never fully declared nor understood—seemed to solidify. The Portuguese magazine *Arquitectura* drew heavily from Italian architectural discourse, echoing its compositional and socio-political themes. It admired Italy's focus on social housing, especially at the 1948 Milan Triennale, and helped integrate these ideas into Portuguese architecture. In the final issues of 1949, the editorship of the journal *Arquitectura* was assumed by Alberto José Pessoa (1919-85), an architect who, at that time, still operated within a language of compromise, expressed through forms of prudent stylistic moderation. The change in direction was felt in the journal, marking a decline in interest, as well as in the political tone of the publication, which became more moderate. The debates and theoretical research topics, which until then had drawn vitality from Milanese experiences and the *Congresso*, diminished until they disappeared, giving way to a sequential publication of individual projects. These, although characterized by a high formal quality, did not possess great civic depth. Attention to what was being experimented with in Italy also waned.

In 1951, in the midst of Portugal's isolation, Fernando Távora attended the CIAM in England, where he met the future members of Team X, Coderch, and was introduced to the Torre Velasca, Zevi's writings and the Italian architect who would have a significant influence on his work and that of many Portuguese architects in the early 1950s.

1 Gregorio Carboni-Maestri, "Fernando Távora: The Struggle from Português Suave to the Shifting Aesthetics of Resistance from 1923 to 1953," *Histories of Postwar Architecture* 5, no. 11 (2022): 216–55.

In the same year, even the traditionally conservative and interior design oriented magazine *Arquitectura Portuguesa* dedicated an issue to the IX Triennale di Milano, highlighting the Portuguese interest in Italian innovations. These modern, democratic works contrasted with the Portuguese reality.²

It was no coincidence that this infatuation with Italy flourished with particular intensity during the pivotal historical juncture of 1948-1950—years marked by attempts to break with the past within the most intimate folds of the critical processes of Portuguese architecture. The vast and feverish Italian postwar laboratory was observed with engaged admiration and an almost devout attention, which had tangible repercussions on the design front. These influences were destined to manifest, a few years later, with eloquent visibility, especially in the works of the new generations—Távora foremost among them.

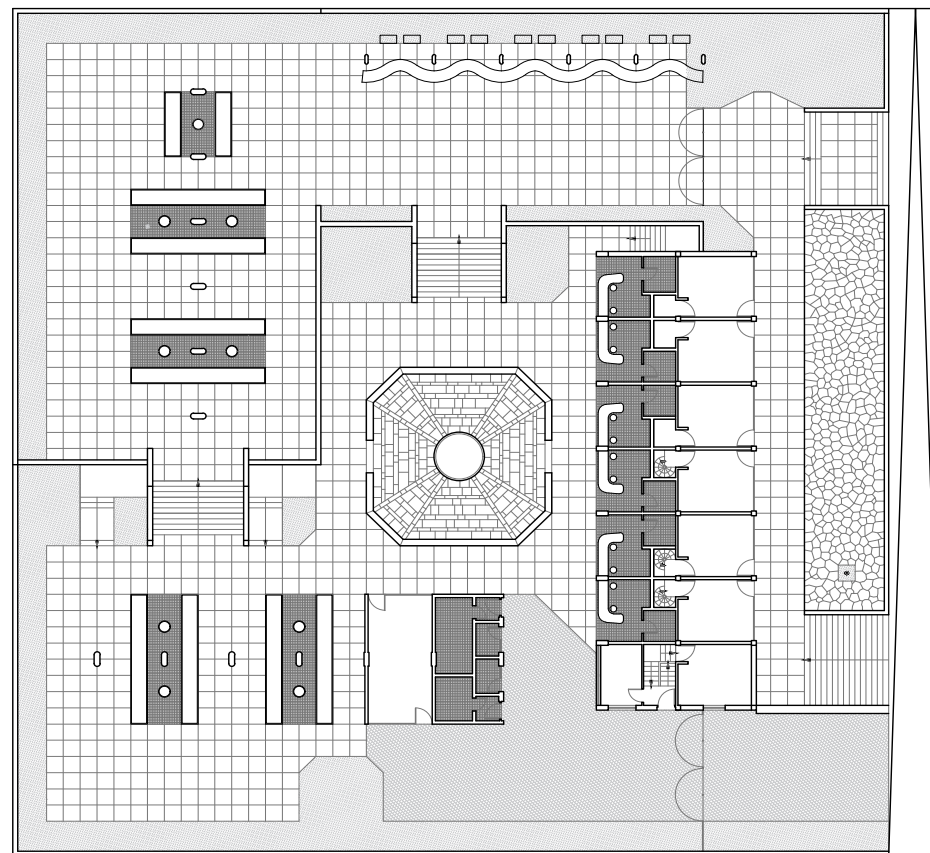
In 1953 the project for one of the most important buildings of the Távora studio began: the Mercado Municipal de Santa Maria da Feira, [Fig. 1] whose cantilevered roof recalls elements of projects such as Rome's Stazione Termini and reflected the stylistic trends that had been spreading in Italy for more than a decade. Távora, probably also influenced by his travels to Milan and the Italian magazines he perused, seems to have captured these developments in his work. Similarities could be traced in works such as Villa Marmont (1940) by Gio Ponti, but it also anticipated affinities that can be found in projects built in the same years, such as the kindergarten in QT8 in Milan (1951) by Arrigo Arrighetti [Fig. 2], Villa Baletti by Ignazio Gardella or Casa Armando Bini (1952–1953) by Ico Parisi.

During the development of this project, in 1955, the Portuguese State funded the Inquérito à Arquitectura Regional Portuguesa (IARP). Távora formed a team responsible for exploring the Minho region and directed this research towards a typological, historical, anthropological and sociological study with strong Italian resonances. Research that helped to demonstrate that popular architecture was more in line with complex and articulated visions than the suave style so beloved of the dictatorship. Research that had a considerable impact on the ESBAP and the work of his studio. A professional studio that the young Álvaro Siza Vieira joined in 1955. The latter had been attending ESBAP since 1949, a period marked by a dense succession of "Italian waves" that, despite cyclical hesitations, left a profound mark on the architectural educational landscape of the time. It was a period in which the novelties, ideas and creative tensions coming from Italy crept within the walls of the academies and found in the *Arquitectura* a vehicle for transmission.³

At the CIAM in Dubrovnik in 1956, Távora, inspired by the IARP and the Italian debate, proposed a "Third way" for Portuguese architecture, independent of both reactionary nationalism and abstract internationalism. In his narratives, he

2 Gregorio Carboni-Maestri, "Tendenze italiane, vie lusitane: architettura analoga: inchiesta storico-critico-analitica sulle influenze e dialettiche fra architettura moderna e contemporanea portoghese ed italiana, dai primi del Novecento, ai giorni nostri" (Master's thesis, Politecnico di Milano, 2007).

3 Álvaro Siza Vieira, interview by Gregorio Carboni-Maestri, Porto, 2004, audiocassette recording.



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frequently alluded to the heterogeneous milieu and international network cultivated during his involvement with CIAM. Among the few with whom he established ties were the Italians Albini and Gardella.⁴

As Siza himself recalled, joining Távora's office represented the threshold to global architecture for him, thanks to his international contacts. It was within this office, which was replete with foreign and Italian books and periodicals, that Siza encountered Bruno Zevi's book *Storia dell'architettura moderna 1. Da William Morris ad Alvar Aalto: la ricerca spazio-temporale*.⁵

The works of Zevi and, naturally, those of Aalto, along with many other Italian publications of the time, played a significant role in the cultural formation of the architect from Matosinhos. For the young Siza, this marked the beginning of a phase that had fundamental consequences for his education and early design activities: an "early Siza" *pre-25 de Abril*, itself divided into two sub-phases, indirectly conveying elements of the Italian debate.

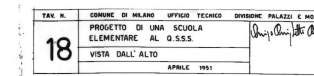
The first was influenced by two key figures: his teacher and friend Fernando Távora, who embodied a Portuguese translation of currents coming mostly from Italy, amalgamating critical revisions by architects such as Rogers, Scarpa,

Fig. 1

Municipal Market of Santa Maria da Feira (1953–1959), drawings by Dario Erioli. Mantua Hub of the Politecnico di Milano, Távora Architetture Paesaggi Genealogie, research and teaching activities coordinated by Barbara Bogoni and Marco Cillis (in B. Bogoni and M. Cillis, *Architetture Paesaggi Genealogie*, Milan: Biblion, 2025)

4 Juan Frechilla Camoiras, "Fernando Távora: conversaciones en Oporto," *Arquitectura, revista del Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Madrid*, no. 261 (1986): 22–28.

5 Siza Vieira, interview by Carboni-Maestri, Porto, 2004.



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Albini, Ridolfi, Mollino, De Carlo, Gardella, and Valle, as well as second-hand Italian translations from the Catalan architectural context. The other figure, Alvar Aalto, became known to Siza thanks to Italy,⁶ as Italian rediscovered and enthusiastically disseminated the work of the previously little-known Finnish architect.

This "Italian" Aalto-Távora sub-phase was followed by another design moment influenced by an additional figure introduced in Portugal through the Italian debate: Adolf Loos.⁷ Despite a short period of stagnation, the magazine *Arquitectura* soon re-established itself, starting in 1956, as a central platform for Portugal's most active architectural movements. It firmly established itself as the magazine later mythologized by historiography—a kind of Portuguese counterpart to *Casabella continuità*, embodying an "*Arquitectura continuidade*" in its own right.

In that same year, Fernando Távora, together with Siza, began the vacation home for Dr. Fernando Ribeiro da Silva in Pinhal de Ofir (1956–1959).⁸ The aesthetic approach paralleled developments in Italy during the same period, such as Luigi Piccinato's elementary school in Borgo Venusio, Matera (1953) and, to some extent, Gregotti, Meneghetti, and Stoppino's Sforza House at Stradella (1953). Similar explorations were later undertaken by Helg and Albini in the Villa Allemandi at Punta Ala (1959–1961).

Fig. 2

Arrigo Arrighetti, school project, 1951, Milan. Archivio Storico Civico e Biblioteca Trivulziana, Arrigo Arrighetti Collection 24, file II, no. 7 (Comune di Milano – all legal rights reserved)

6 Kenneth Frampton, *Álvaro Siza: tutte le opere* (Milan: Electa, 1999), 574.

7 Francesco Dal Co, "Álvaro Siza and the Art of Fusion," in *Álvaro Siza: Complete Works*, ed. by Kenneth Frampton (London: Phaidon, 2000), 7.

8 Michel Toussaint, *Casa de férias em Ofir / Summer House at Ofir* (Lisbon: Blau, 1992).

From that moment, *Arquitectura*, directed since 1957 by the very italophile Nuno Portas, became more substantial, articulated, and comprehensive in every aspect, unprecedented in the periodical's history. It assumed the characteristics of a truly modern magazine, capable of representing what was being produced—or hoped to be produced—in Portugal. This endeavor established a particularly attentive and fruitful relationship with Italy, once again observed with extraordinary interest. The magazine resumed again a militant and progressive stance, characterized by a pronounced intellectual and social commitment, giving rise to a cultural action of great depth. The analyses spanned from painting to urban planning, from civil to religious architecture.

Parallel to these in-depth studies of Italian editorial taste, the magazine included other articles of equally Italian “origin”, concerning issues of industrial design and interior architecture.⁹ Expressions of the *professionismo colto*¹⁰ such as Vitellozzi, Eugenio Montuori, Figini and Pollini, with their *chiesa* La Martella, exemplifying a paradoxical industrial architectural language church,¹¹ Luigi Carlo Daneri, Castellazzi, Fadigati, and others found space in the magazine's pages.

In the subsequent year, 1958, Távora presented the results of his IARP inquiry to dictator Salazar, who was surprised by the architect's youth. Távora succeeded in shifting the design approach towards a neo-vernacular, almost idiomatic-brutalist attitude—inaugurating its Third way of post-Rogers flavour.

With the culmination of the Inquiry, Portuguese architecture seemed to emerge, embracing a broader perspective while maintaining its indigenous roots. No longer an observer, it actively engaged in a dialogue that aspired to an international dimension, free from the constraints imposed by the “suave Portuguese” style. A remarkable formal expressiveness matured, characterized by plastic-constructive richness interwoven with local references, measured realism, and an organic impetus. This synthesis found its epitome in Siza's nascent works. Nuno Porta's *Arquitectura* served as a chronicler of this evolution, while perpetuating its dialogue with Italy—a nation that provided a multifaceted reference point for both culturally committed figures and those less politically entangled. Its influence manifested in elegant intellectual explorations, audacious experiments in reinforced concrete reminiscent of Nervi,¹² or Ponti's professional rigor.

In its issue 68 (July 1960), *Arquitectura* dedicated sixteen pages to Siza, with emphasis on the *Grupo de Moradias em Matosinhos*.¹³ This work already exhibited distinctive traits of an evolving architectural poetics. But what was particularly surprising in this issue was the featured work of a hitherto unknown Silvia

Baudouin Viana de Lima. Her designs, whose architectural characteristics resonated with those of Siza, strikingly emphasized the emergence and stabilization of primary elements of architectural composition, notably the wall, which assumed an unexpected, if not unprecedented, centrality in the Lusitanian context, regaining a formal tension and semantic significance that had gradually dissipated in the post-World War II Portuguese landscape.

A renewed centrality that was more and more evident, albeit less explicitly, in the works of other masters such as Távora and Keil do Amaral. This resurgence was not merely stylistic but structural and spatial, reinstating the wall as a directive element in architectural space and placing it at the heart of a revitalized compositional play. In this process, a clear influence from the Milanese environment emerged, whose impact became increasingly manifest in defining not only a language but a precise design attitude. To dispel any ambiguity regarding the origins of these tendencies in the case of Silvia Viana de Lima, a document dated 23 March 1960 serves as evidence: the translation—undertaken by herself—of Ernesto Nathan Rogers' essay *A arquitetura moderna desde a geração dos mestres*,¹⁴ originally published in *Casabella Continuità*, no. 211, in June–July 1956, under the title “L'Architettura moderna dopo la generazione dei Maestri”.

A remarkable 30-page booklet, which remained somehow overlooked by historiography, resurfaced in 2004 during archival research.¹⁵ At first glance, this work might be dismissed as a mere editorial endeavour—a straightforward translation of a minor document. However, deeper examination reveals it to be of significance. As elucidated by Carlos Ramos in the volume's introduction, the text embodies the final wish of its translator, the young Silvia Baudouin Viana de Lima—“an eminent and dear pupil of this School.” Aware of her impending demise, she entrusted her parents with the publication of this specific *Casabella* essay from E. Nathan Rogers, deeming it “a matter of honour.”

This poignant biographical detail underscores the profound esteem in which the Milan School was held by that generation of students. The publication, though concise, encapsulates and elucidates a previously unnamed movement that, within the subterranean currents of Portuguese architectural education and practice—particularly in Oporto—fostered a privileged cultural rapport between Portugal and Italy. Prior to this, such a connection could only be inferred from fragmentary evidence: appearances of Italian articles in periodicals, stylistic references, conceptual parallels in the works of intellectually attuned architects, interviews or the infrequent travels of professionals.

Ramos's heartfelt testimony in the introduction is particularly illuminating:

It is since the advent of Modern Architecture that, from time to time – as if to call to order the professionals who, less alert and more inexperienced, are irresistibly seduced by the apparent vigour and variety of contemporary

9 Articles such as António Sena da Silva, “Formas utilitárias industriais e artesanais,” *Arquitectura*, no. 59 (1957): 31.

10 Maria Vittoria Capitanucci, *Il professionismo colto nel dopoguerra* (Milano: Solferino Edizioni, 2015).

11 Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini, “Igrejas de La Martella e Baggio,” *Arquitectura*, no. 60 (1957): 31–33.

12 Pier Luigi Nervi, “A influência do betão armado e os progressos técnicos e científicos sobre a arquitectura presente e futura,” *Arquitectura*, no. 71 (1960): 43.

13 Nuno Portas, “Grupo de moradias em Matosinhos,” *Arquitectura*, no. 68 (1960): 14.

14 Ernesto Nathan Rogers, *A arquitetura moderna desde a geração dos mestres*, trans. Silvia Viana de Lima (Porto: Edições C.I.A.M., 1960).

15 Carboni-Maestri, “Tendenze italiane, vie lusitane,” 111.

aesthetic concepts and currents – the great stars descend into the field with their unquestionable authority, to which others have already bestowed their faith and their valid and opportune contribution and testimony. Ernesto Rogers’ manifesto fits into this healthy rotativism, [...] whose content and coherence of thought and action deserve to be highlighted. The analysis he makes of the ‘four stars of the first magnitude’ – Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier – and the distinct role he gives to each of them in the task of definitive consolidation of the ‘movement’, is simply impressive in its fidelity, affection and respectful attitude. A masterly lesson in idealism and exemplary ‘intransigence’, [...] doctrine generously and prophetically employed in it. Ernesto Rogers’ manifesto fits into this salutary rotation, [...] whose content and coherence of thought and action merit emphasis.¹⁶

In the ensuing years, Távora embarked upon the conception of both the town hall and a banking institution in Aveiro (1963–1967). [Fig. 3] In this venture, he grappled with the notion of monumentality, approaching it with an unexpectedly intimate perspective, intertwining it with explorations and studies aimed at rejuvenating the city’s decorative lexicon. This vision materialized through the building’s proportions and its dialogue with the surroundings, as well as in the design of its apertures, which harkened back to the architectural heritage of numerous pre-war public edifices on the Italian peninsula, resonating with the movements led by Albini, Rogers, Samonà, and notably, Gardella.

And, years later, within the coastal enclave of Caxinas, the Cova Housing Complex (1970–72) emerged as another articulation of an “Italian-imported” sensibility in the architectural language of Álvaro Siza. In this case an indirect one, Adolf Loos. Herein, one discerns the embryonic formulation of a poetics that would become definitive of his oeuvre: the austere, implacable white wall. This device, later substantiated and reaffirmed in the post-Revolução years by the theoretical armature of Aldo Rossi and the Milanese school, constitutes a salient manifestation of what has come to be recognised as the Oporto School—a phenomenon that, while sharing certain formal and theoretical affinities with the *Tendenza*, emerged from distinctly Portuguese historical and political conditions, processing Italian influences through its own critical framework.¹⁷

The 25th of April 1974 marked not merely the overthrow of a regime, but an inflection point in Portugal’s architectural trajectory. The Revolution, propelled by a coalition of young military officers, students and workers—bearing socialist aspirations that, as in post-’45 Italy, would be subsequently deflected by the elites—acted as a catalyst for architectural redefinition.

¹⁶ Translation by the author.

¹⁷ See, for example, Manuel Mendes, “Recent Portuguese Architecture (A Widespread Geography, Some Coincidences),” *Casabella*, no. 579 (May 1991): 51–55; Nuno Portas and Manuel Mendes, *Portugal: Architecture, the Last Twenty Years* (Milan: Electa, 1991); and Jorge Figueira, *Escola do Porto: um mapa crítico* (Coimbra: eldjarq, 2002).



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Prior to this juncture, the national architectural discourse, like the political condition, had wavered in a liminal state of confused and fragmented experimentations, typical of the 1960s and early 1970s. This uncertainty, paradoxically, bore traces of an Italian derivation too. But it was through the convulsive energy of the Revolution that Portuguese architecture underwent a decisive rupture—both epistemic and formal. In this crucible, architecture was summoned not merely to respond, but to intervene; not merely to reflect, but to redeem.

Out of this rupture emerged clarity: typological, compositional, and stylistic. A new disciplinary consciousness coalesced—one that gravitated around the

Fig. 3

Fernando Távora, Town Hall and Caixa Geral de Depósitos, 1963–1967, Aveiro (Photograph Copyright © Paulo Lousinha – all legal rights reserved)

figure and legacy of Fernando Távora, but also benefited of the Italian cultural and design armamentarium. Within this matrix, the architectural project assumed an ethical valence, becoming an instrument of societal reconfiguration.

This emergent ethos was documented, interpreted, and disseminated in the pages of *Arquitectura*, the journal that became both chronicler and agitator of the new condition. And the impact was immediate: on the 6th of August 1974, the first provisional government instituted the SAAL (Serviço Ambulatório de Apoio Local), under the direction of Nuno Portas, then Secretary of State for Housing and Urbanism. Thus commenced one of the most generous and paradigmatic episodes of post-revolutionary architectural praxis—a noble, if ultimately thwarted, attempt to realign architecture with the emancipatory aspirations of the *polis*.¹⁸

Among the most emblematic examples of this transformative period stands Álvaro Siza's SAAL São Victor project, a true paradigm of the post-revolutionary era that commenced in the year of 1974. He had just completed two projects: the Borges & Irmão bank headquarters in Vila do Conde (1964–1974) and an unexecuted office building planned for Avenida D. Afonso Henriques in Oporto (1968–1974). These designs revealed the depth of the change that would occur in his design language after 1974, starting with São Victor, serving as silent testimony to the transition from a freer compositional attitude to an architectural philosophy imbued with social responsibility.

In both pre-'74 instances, traces of earlier phases remained evident: compositional systems wherein architectural elements—windows, doors, walls, planes, even the rhythm of the *pilotis*—never appeared as isolated or autonomous entities but seemed to emerge from a concatenation of complex design moves. These often rooted in a diagonal and dynamic logic that favoured spatial tension over symmetry, flowing beyond the rigid definition of parts. With the onset of the revolutionary fervour and societal upheaval of that period, this aesthetic-design phase in Siza's work came to an abrupt and decisive end. An immediate and irreversible metamorphosis occurred, leading to an Italian-accent linguistic transfiguration evident in the design of the S. Victor housing estate, completed four years later. Here, a language of walls, linearity, and order manifested, permeated by a metaphysical quality akin to the Tendenza movement. This emerging language crystallized into the archetypal expression of Siza and, by extension, the contemporary national architectural identity.

This solidarity did not arise through a direct and unequivocal link with concepts such as 'sensitivity,' 'universality,' 'spontaneity,' or 'regionalism' attributed to various Oporto School authors. Instead, the quintessence of erudite and intentional Portuguese architecture reflected a particular ideological expression of a post-revolutionary Portuguese identity—civic, almost generic—*chã*—. An

18 José António Bandeira, *O processo SAAL e a arquitetura no 25 de abril de 1974* (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2007).

existential—and political—connection with Italy had been established, wherein Rationalism, the Third Way, Neorealism, and the Tendenza represented not merely stylistic panoramas but conceptual resources that Portuguese architects critically appropriated and transformed, synthesizing them with neo modernist vocabularies, vernacular traditions and revolutionary urgencies into a distinctive architectural position that exceeded its Italian sources. Siza's "white wall," which subsequently became almost a national linguistic symbol for all architects, did not so much allude to Le Corbusier's avant-garde purism but rather to the millenary tradition evoked during that revolutionary period.

It became evident how the prior inclinations of the School of Oporto toward the critical experiences of Italian schools—particularly the Milanese, active between the 1930s and 1960s—were configured as dialogue, admiration, observation, emulation, influence, shared sensitivity, transmission, and study. These elements, conveyed largely through figures like Fernando Távora and others, generated a profound bond destined to take root deeply in the essence of Portuguese architecture. Thus, at a historical juncture urgently demanding design theories and practices capable of responding to the era's complexity—based on a rational, materialist, and, in part, communist-inspired vision of society and space—the infusion of contributions from the Tendenza movement and what might, with certain critical indulgence, be termed today as a "third Italian infatuation," asserted itself with surprising naturalness. This bond seemed to connect Aldo Rossi to the new generations of the insurrectionary period, with feedback that integrated into Portuguese architectural culture. From this relationship, from this composed passion, emerged, in part, the contemporary Portuguese architecture as we recognize it today, with figures such as Álvaro Siza Vieira, Eduardo Souto de Moura, Gonçalo Byrne, and others, not solely linked to the School of Oporto.

In the evolution of Portuguese architecture during the post-Carnations period, the nascent architectural language could not overtly adopt the lexicon of Rossi. This restraint stemmed not only from Rossi's style being of Italian origin—while Portuguese architects aspired to realize finally a distinctly "popular" architecture—but also from prevalent misinterpretations. Initially, many misconstrued the style of Rossi and the Tendenza movement, perceiving it as a progressive iteration, or at worst, a 'fascist' version of Português Suave. This led to profound misunderstandings and distortions within the Portuguese community regarding Rossi's work, with some hastily labeling him and superficially associating his architecture with the monumentalism characteristic of Muzio and Piacentini.¹⁹

Nevertheless, this did not deter numerous projects from emulating Milan's Gallarate, resulting in what could be termed an acute "Gallaratesitis" within the Portuguese architectural context of that era, of which Malagueira [Fig. 4] also formed an indirect part.²⁰ In Malagueira (1977–97) this architectural ethos finds

19 Siza Vieira, interview by Carboni-Maestri, Porto, 2004.

20 Carboni-Maestri, "Tendenze italiane, vie lusitane," 131.

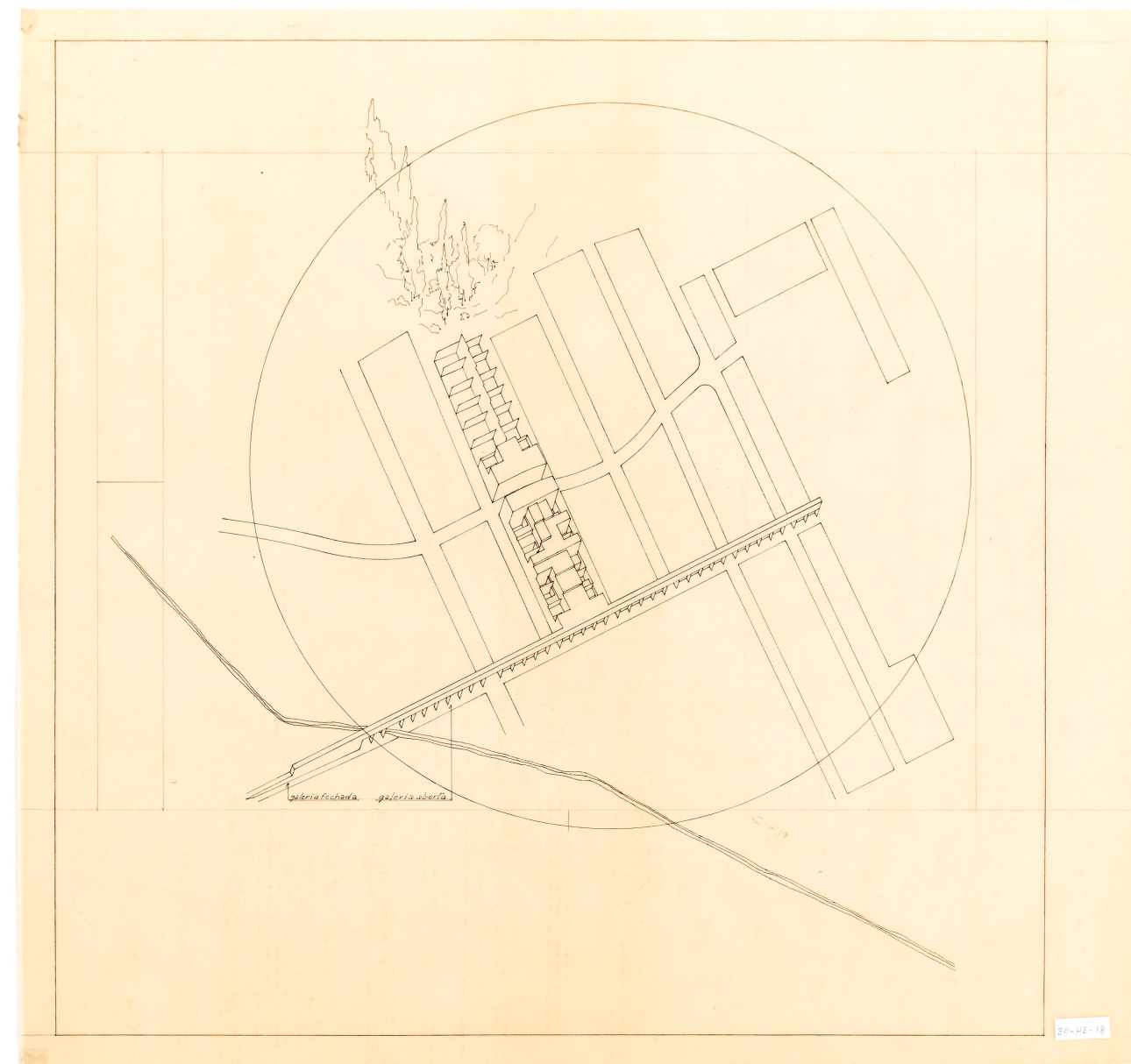
its most articulate expression. Not solely in the urban morphology redolent of Rossi's *L'architettura della città*, but more pointedly in the typological rigour and the dialectical deployment of apertures—windows and doors conceived not as scenic episodes but as anti-picturesque instruments, evoking a reterritorialised Loos filtered through Aldo's theoretical lens. This was a post-revolutionary poetics in which form became a vehicle of historical redress.

The influence of Rossi's thought and Italian neo-rationalism permeated this phase, initially under subtle guises, occasionally camouflaged, yet betrayed by recurrent and significant lapses that unveiled a new compositional matrix. In the São Victor project, for instance, this presence manifested, albeit subdued, in one of the most eloquent details: the incorporation of existing ruined walls into the design of the popular houses. These remnants were intentionally preserved as unmistakable signs of the Rossi school's influence—an intellectual, Piranesian gesture that simultaneously accepted reality and acknowledged the traces left by Salazarism in a Portugal both reborn and ancient, gradually emerging from a half-century of enforced torpor.

Rossi's echo extended beyond this fragment of ruin; it also revealed itself in the regular and repeated sequence of windows and doors, which, for the first time, appeared as elements endowed with formal autonomy—recognizable and complete. This regularity reflected the overall order of the design, determined by the nature of the program—a series of affordable housing units—and the constraints imposed by the client. The overarching compositional strategy established the key principles: walls as continuous, autonomous planes; regular fenestration as elements with formal independence; ruins incorporated as signs of historical memory. São Victor itself employed coloured render—pale turquoise / teal—rather than the white surfaces that would later become emblematic. These compositional and typological principles, drawing upon Loosian and Aalto matrices, would crystallize in subsequent works into the austere white plaster that became definitive of Siza's mature language and, by extension, of Portuguese post-revolutionary architecture.

Thus emerged an architectural language marked by neo-purist forms of modernist taste, one that resonated with Italian neo-rationalism while remaining irreducible to it, shaped equally by local vernacular traditions, the specificity of the revolutionary moment, and a critical engagement with multiple international sources. While these forms referenced Italian precedents, they also mirrored a still unresolved, perhaps incongruous, relationship between that generation of designers and the historical masters of the Modern Movement.

During its prolonged and stagnating interlude under the New State, vast stretches of Portuguese twentieth-century architecture lay inert, lulled and slumbered beneath the anaesthetic grip of fascism. This dominion forbade modernity, in its broadest sense, from emerging or taking root in Portugal. In architecture, what the regime wrought stood as an interrupted, then fragmentary, and finally compromised and frustrated modernity. An unclaimed modernity



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remained untested, recuperated only in fragments, and conformed ideologically to the regime's will. Even when the belated and fleeting embrace of American corporate modernism fell under the agonizing clutch of Estado Novo, the more conscious architects discerned, with bitter clarity, that nothing in the formalities of late *modernisme* bore any intrinsic promise of democracy or emancipation.

Yet this delay in Portugal's architectural evolution left the first purist Modernity—its initial ideological and formal phase—untouched in the eyes of some architects, a vision untainted, a distant memory of an ideal never realized. This shielded Modernity lingered untouched in its formal purity, suspended within the spirit of its time, unburdened by the once-alluring enthusiasms and naïvetés of the technical-futuristic positivism of its national bourgeoisie.

In time, this idealization, caught in the narrow oscillation of its growth, transformed itself. To the architects of Oporto, it became a pragmatic, political,

Fig. 4
Álvaro Siza, site plan with
axonometric housing blocks,
1977, Malagueira, Évora (Ink on
film, 479 x 510 mm. DMC 3140,
Drawing Matter Collections)

critical, then resilient, and above all, resistant formal weapon of struggle. Yet it yielded, as all things must, to the unrelenting force of reality and the widening gulf of historical distance. It turned into a postmodern modernity. And if, with the Revolution, modernity arrived bereft of the Modern architectural movement, Modernism and Modernity could not be mistaken for a single phenomenon.

Yet, though in Portugal, the full bloom of Modernity did not find its consummation before the Revolution, this truth is now gainsaid by an ever-multiplying host of historians, scholars, and academic institutions. These, often abetted by public authorities through congresses, gatherings, publications, exhibitions, learned orations, and university research, weave an illusory narrative of a “normalized” Lusitanian modernity. The purpose of such a fabrication appears to be the construction of a historiography that secures Portugal’s rightful place within the grand current of European modernism. And yet, as with Lusotropicalism’s palliation of colonial brutalities, this endeavour, at best, overlooks—or at worst, erases—the dictatorial regime’s oppressive shadow that held Portugal and its colonies in its grip from 1930 to 1974, stifling, arresting, and isolating the nation.

The Estado Novo did not merely constrain the Modern Movement in Portugal—it reduced it to an episodic, peripheral, and, in the grand reckoning, wholly inconsequential affair. This revisionist effort belongs to a larger, insidious tendency of our times, whereby the past is not so much interrogated through the lens of rigorous inquiry and empirical truth but rather refashioned upon unspoken melancholies, enforced rehabilitations, reworkings for the sake of prestige, and identity-driven revanchism.²¹ This inclination, ever more prevalent in contemporary historiography, bends itself to the confirmation of distorted narratives by singling out exceptions and anomalies, thereby turning History into what one *wishes* had come to pass, rather than what truly *did*.²²

However, unlike what some critics contended—and often the very designers embroiled in such analyses—the Oporto School’s approach did not embody an evolving postmodernity. Jorge Figueira, to cite an instance, in his *A Periferia Perfeita: Pós-Modernidade na Arquitectura Portuguesa, Anos 60 - Anos 80*, depicted Portugal as an “ideal periphery,” for, in the fullest sense of a postmodern exercise, it no longer appeared in relation to a dominant “modern” center. From this vantage, Portuguese architecture might have arisen “more majestic.”²³

Once more, there seemed to be a will to weave narratives of virtue and rehabilitation through the prism of the School, as though, by means of a process of so-called *presentism*, historiography might rewrite an idealized past.²⁴ Yet, such had never been the purpose of historiography. And here, the postmodern

ought to have been enclosed within clearer bounds and properly understood.²⁵ One could scarcely speak of an “after” in a nation that had never truly known an authentic modern phase. But the matter did not rest there. For, even supposing one acknowledged a “subsequent” in the sense of critical transcendence—a notion valid for Távora and his circle of peers—the label “postmodern” still posed its troubles. Particularly so when the revolutionary age dawned—that moment of socio-political modernity’s ascent, an immune response against the capitalist-fascist tumor, borne of antibodies cultivated through years of political engagement, even within the realm of architecture.

This, in turn, averted the perilous descent into the abyss of antimodern postmodern cynicism—the unraveling of Marxist legacies under the weight of deconstruction, the dissonant fugue of Parisian post-structuralism, the demobilizing *riflusso* of the 1980s, the ethereal abstractions of Gianni Vattimo in 1983, the illusory finality heralded by Fukuyama’s end of history in 1992, or the self-congratulatory dismantling of meaning celebrated by Mark Wigley in 1994. Happily, such illusions now lie behind us. We have awakened to the enduring flow of history and with it, the promise of new April 25ths. And white walls. With windows.

21 Richard J. J. Yidana, “Controlling Narratives, Controlling Histories: Political Discourses of Anticolonial Nationalism” (PhD diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 2006).

22 See, for example, John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2019), which exemplifies this tendency.

23 Jorge Figueira, “A periferia perfeita: pós-modernidade na arquitectura portuguesa, anos 60–anos 80” (PhD diss., Universidade de Coimbra, 2009), 14.

24 François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

25 Perez Zagorin, “Historiography and Postmodernism: Reconsiderations,” *History and Theory* 29, no. 3 (1990): 263–74.

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