

*Landscapes of Care. Public housing across multiple
geographies: crossing theories and practices*



SOPHIA
scopio EDITIONS

volume 9, issue 1 | publication year: 2024
issn: 2183-8976 [print] 2183-9468 [online]
isbn: 978-989-53640-8-4

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homepage: <https://www.up.pt/index.php/sophia>

Errante¹: contemporary devices for heuristic reflexions on housing, Malagueira, Marselha, and La Borda.

Sérgio Miguel Teixeira Magalhães

Abstract

This reflexion makes visible the relationships between humans and the production of the built environment, proposing an exploration of the behavioural space between two collaborative narratives: the disciplinary, and the non-disciplinary.

The aim is to examine the position of architects and their practices in addressing *the socio-environmental crisis facing the planet today*.

Questioning architecture predominantly through a disciplinary lens limits the integration of practices that fall outside dominant narratives. In pedagogical frameworks, it is crucial to venture beyond these boundaries and question how to learn from divergent practices that inherently function as educational tools. Non-disciplinarily (by wandering about how *bodies* are perceived in its social context), we understand how these devices work and unmistakably broaden the field of architecture from multimodal design practices.

However, divergent methods alone are insufficient for professionals to effectively engage with communities in addressing contemporary issues (within the built environment) due to formal constraints. This inadequacy suggests the emergence of an *ideo-cultural crisis* alongside the socio-environmental one, underscoring the urgent need to resolve a persistent educational paradox regarding the relationship between disciplinary, and non-disciplinary approaches.

Through the analysis of three cases (*Unité, Malagueira, and La Borda*), the article identifies approaches that operate both within, and outside dominant narratives, relating complex scenarios as catalysts for simpler, more inclusive, and sustainable heuristic decisions.

Positioned as a proposal for a viable landscape of sustainable social progression, the article engages in heuristic reflections to interrogate how robust mechanisms of loss – reconfigured as constructive actions – inform project activities. These activities, in turn, are examined for their capacity to steer architectural *praxis* toward an empathetic framework for architect-education, derived from the *ethos* of the field and practice of architecture.

Keywords: *errante*; heuristic; multimodal; autonomy; power.

¹Errante (english (UK): wandering): author's translation, selected from Caspar David Friedrich's *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*, 1818. A work set in the Romantic period; it depicts a man standing before a rocky gorge while observing a landscape characterised by a thick sea of fog. A relationship between the sublime and self-reflection, based on the evocation of the landscape and on the contemplation of the man situated within the realisation of his drift in the time of his life.

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Sérgio Miguel Teixeira Magalhães is a PhD Candidate FAUP; specialisation in Representations, Drawings, and Images of the Territory FBAUP; specialisation in Heritage and Landscape FAUP; advanced Video Capture ESAP; academic researcher in Editorial Programs FAAULP; academic training in architecture FAAULP.

Since 2000, interpolates specific creative fields such as architecture, visual design (graphic and web) and product design in a studio environment *STUDIUM creative studio*; directs brand creation and brand strategy at *AMMP brand & management agency*; elaborates on products and systems at *PTMADE production house*.

Such is our way of thinking – we find beauty not in the thing itself but in the patterns of shadows, the light and the darkness, that one thing against another creates.

Jun'ichirō Tanizaki *In Praise of Shadows* 1933



[Fig. 1]
2024 Behavioural space "as" a place. La Borda. Barcelona, Spain. author's photograph

Capitalism of care

Wandering in between the disciplinary, and the non-disciplinary

Architecture can be understood as a medium of cultural and personal significance, shaped by the tension between collective and individual design aspirations, as well as the dynamics between autonomous creative expression and the interactive relationship between occupant (user) and designer (author).

According to (Barthes 1980), architecture, like photography, can be approached through either an intellectual lens (considering cultural, social, and historical contexts) or an emotional one, rooted in personal and sentimental understanding. His concepts of *studium* and *punctum* are particularly relevant: "studium" refers to the analytical observation of a composition or theme, understanding its cultural relevance; "punctum" describes how we are emotionally affected by the context, evoking a response based on personal memories and experiences. These concepts intertwine, blending detached observation (*studium*) with intimate connection (*punctum*) in a complex and dynamic relationship.

Similarly, disciplinary practices invoke systematic approaches based on "detached observation," adhering to established rules and methods. In contrast, non-disciplinary practices are intuitive, flexible, and guided by "personal connections," diverging from formal structures and rooted in individual experience – *punctum* refers to our spontaneous and emotional responses. *Punctum's* unpredictability and unique "interpretation of real" are fundamental in decision-making and knowledge production—constructing where *punctum* is closer to a heuristic system (non-disciplinary) than to a formal and structured one (disciplinary).

In this study, the concepts of "studium" and "punctum" serve as metaphors for the interaction between "disciplinary" and "non-disciplinary" practices. *Studium* represents the structured and systematic approach of disciplinary practices, which often utilise formal pedagogical devices². In contrast, *punctum* reflects the personal, emotional, and disruptive aspects of non-disciplinary practices, which frequently diverge into multimodal heuristic devices³.

² Formal pedagogical devices are structured, theory-based methods like lectures and group work, designed to guide content delivery and student engagement within a controlled educational framework.

³ Multimodal heuristic devices employ emotional, sentimental, and immaterial channels that transcend disciplinary boundaries, engaging the personal, evocative impact to intuitively guide problem-solving, learning, and exploration.

Recognising these cognitive mechanisms helps us understand the specific relationships between humans and their environment. Specifically, and from an architectural perspective, exploring the space between spatial practice, representations of space and symbolic experiences (Lefebvre 1991) can facilitate the assessment of how the position of architects and their practices can address *the socio-environmental challenges facing the planet* – exploring the distance that separates and/or engages the disciplinary and non-disciplinary fields.⁴

Architectural Autonomy and Porosity: Navigating Socio-Environmental Crises in Public Housing

This study avoids confronting two distinct approaches to architectural theory. Instead, it seeks to mitigate the inherent tensions associated with the concept of autonomy in architecture by examining *a behavioural space that exists between two distinct parts of the system*⁵. It is an exploration that takes place during a period of significant change in the socio-cultural environment, highlighting the need for action that accepts porosity in architectural practice as a multimodality for care.

We are exhausting the time of capitalism, transitioning into a new era called techno feudalism (Varoufakis 2023) where we must adapt to a unforeseen socio-environmental states in all disciplines. Architecture as a discipline relies on practitioners' motivation to address transversal issues (especially in the public housing sector) where design must evolve to meet immaterial needs and embrace a degree of uncertainty about the resulting *capital*.

4 Polarising projects like *Unité d'Habitation* exemplify representations of space, where top-down planning (Le Corbusier's "machines for living") imposed rigid social hierarchies, alienating residents from their lived space. This disconnection mirrors Lefebvre's critique of capitalist spatial production, where abstract, homogenized designs prioritize efficiency over socio-cultural specificity. Modernist housing, as a tool of state or capitalist power, reproduces inequality by commodifying space into standardized units, erasing local identities. In contrast, *La Borda* embodies representational spaces through cooperative design, where residents actively shape their environment. Lefebvre's emphasis on "the right to the city" aligns with such projects, advocating for spaces produced by and for communities rather than imposed ideologies. Siza's *Malagueira* stands in the middle.

5 The space is a meta reference to the disciplinary/non-disciplinary practices, that can help us translate the field of architecture into observable and actionable characteristics about the built environment engaging with Henri Lefebvre (symbolic), Beatriz Colombini (gendered power dynamics) and Doreen Massey (geopolitic) symbiotic constructions of space.

We can now say that social housing, which initially aimed to defeat social inequalities, has been clearly exploited by capitalism (i.e. how it views occupants as marginalised groups by western standards).⁶ Politically we must critique the nation-state model, which relies on domination and oppression, and advocate for "democratic confederalism," where power is decentralised, and communities govern themselves through direct responsibility and democracy. This is a vision that empowers marginalised groups, especially women, by emphasizing gender equality and ecological sustainability (Ocalan 2020) and by delving into the historical development of power structures, analysing how state systems perpetuate inequality. A radical rethinking of society to create a peaceful and just world beyond current political constraints must address the root of the problem even before questions are formulated.

Anticipation is key, and education is the only tool capable of igniting this need.

While capitalism in social housing has met its goals, fostering dependency on a discriminatory credit structure, it has also fallen victim to its own success, giving rise to new market dynamics, including algorithmic and virtual realities. In the broader housing sector, neoliberal practices have commodified property, leading to the privatisation of social housing and fragmented ownership, complicating large-scale asset control. Publicly funded projects are increasingly replaced by private investments to meet capital demands, catering again to large investment funds. This shift has led to a decline in traditional public housing investment (opening a space for hybrid-divergent models) as normal options are replaced by trendy private housing, pushing communities in need into an endless cycle of racialisation and discrimination due to subversive access to credit.

The opportunity for transformation presents itself every time a radical change occurs, repeatedly in the form of a transitional time and space architecture evokes as cure to our habitat, usually from loss.

⁶ Modernist housing's failure to resist these forces (evident in *Unite's* Airbnb conversion) highlights architecture's complicity in techno-feudal extractivism. *La Borda's* cooperative model counters this by decentralizing ownership, echoing Varoufakis' call for democratic confederalism.



[Fig. 2]

1972 Pruitt-Igoe collapse series. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pruitt-igoe_collapse-series.jpg

... July 15, 1972 at 3:32 p.m. (or thereabouts) ...⁷

Gentrification has profoundly affected public and cooperative housing projects⁸, leading to the displacement of urban communities and the replacement of established neighbourhoods with transient visitors. Many social housing examples have become politicised and perceived as dangerous or insecure. However, some have emerged as sites of resistance, challenging capitalism and renewing interest in social housing over investment-driven solutions. This shift has sparked criticism of traditional models and encouraged new experimental approaches informed by the 1970s.

At the turn of the millennium, architecture faced challenges that fuelled social change and created arenas for capitalist ideologies, such as private property, profit, individualism, and competition. This crisis also spurred the adoption of more practical and innovative solutions, moving beyond rigid dogmas.

The design of a building becomes central to materializing these ideologies, shaped by socio-political and economic contexts. Architects are influenced by their observations of the world, though peer pressure often dominates academia, office environments, and government sectors.

In response to these dynamics, some practitioners began stepping outside traditional structures in the 1970s, pursuing collaborative approaches aimed at addressing users' real needs and countering the decline of the modern movement. Their efforts sought equity rather than mere comparative evaluation among peers.

The transformations since the 1970s reveal a persistent modernist dominance. Postmodernism failed to break the paradigmatic colonisation of our habitat by modernist prototypes. Like capitalism, modernism imposed an enduring ideological perspective, with architects complicit in maintaining this power dynamic while deferring to political forces and unsustainable extraction practices.

The connection between modernism and globalisation is evident in contemporary architectural practice, where the uncritical repetition of models hampers the search for effective housing solutions. The environmental crisis and social fragmentation driven by inequality – exacerbated by global phenomena such as the international style and gentrification – highlight architecture's failure to break free from dogma and explore alternative ideological and disciplinary paths. In the end, comparing modernism and globalisation states the imminent disintegration of capitalism and the pressing need for new models for the built environment.

The modernist movement imposed an ideological perspective that still influences the field today, highlighting the urgent need for a critical reassessment of architectural practices (Tafari 1976).

7 "Modern Architecture died in St Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3.32 p.m. (or thereabouts) when the infamous Pruitt Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab 3 blocks, were given the final coup de grâce by dynamite. Previously it had been vandalised, mutilated and defaced by its black inhabitants, and although millions of dollars were pumped back, trying to keep it alive (fixing the broken elevators, repairing smashed windows, repainting). It was finally put out of its misery. Boom, boom, boom." Jencks, Charles. 1984. *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*. 4th, revised and enlarged edition. Rizzoli: New York. Part One: The death of modern architecture p.09

8 i.e. some apartments in *Unité d'Habitation* and Siza's *Bairro da Bouça* are now privately owned and listed on Airbnb and Booking platforms.

THEORETICAL PAPERS

Typo morphologies ⁹	<i>Unité d'Habitation</i>	Bairro da Malagueira	<i>La Borda</i>
country	France	Portugal	Spain
city	Marseille	Évora	Barcelona
regime	Fourth Republic	I Democratic Government	Constitutional Monarchy
political ideology	tripartism socialism, communism, Christian democrats, and gaullism	socialism, communism	socialism, pro-independence
project	1947	1977	2014
work	1952	1997	2018
construction duration (y)	05	20	04
urban context	peripheric	peripheric	centre
land use	public	public/private	public/time lease
use duration	-	-	75
notion of property	ownership	ownership	rental/rightful succession
plot area	12 000	270 000	1000
type	single building	housing complex	single building
unit type	duplex apartment	single house	apartment
unit number	337	1200	28
variations	02	02	03 (40, 60, 75m ²)
amenities	private	public	private
floors	18	02	08
occupants	1600	~4500	~84
structure	concrete	concrete/masonry/block	concrete/wood/polycarbonate
architect	Corbusier	Siza	Lacol
age	65	44	~
practice	individual	individual	collective cooperative
commission	public	public	private
politics of production	totalitarian	bourgeois	feminist

[Fig. 3]

2024 Public housing: ontological devices and architecture as condition – three scenarios in political chrono-geographies

9 From the post-war social totalitarianism of Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation* (1952) to the post-revolutionary social demands of Siza's *Quinta da Malagueira* (1977) and the high-gentrification social crisis of Lacol's *La Borda* (2018), the selected cases challenge disciplinary and non-disciplinary practices, and examine how a heuristic system of decisions in architecture education could empower architects and enhance their pedagogical authority in the production of the built environment.

Housing as Heuristic: Lessons from Three Case Studies

The totalitarian model: *Unité d'Habitation*

Modernist visions

Architecture is constrained in its ability to address socio-environmental crises due to the limitations of traditional disciplinary boundaries, which frequently ignores the intricate human interactions that shape the built environment. Instead, it fosters a dyslexic social empathy through distinction rather than from the bases of sought after colourful social reform.

Presumptuously named *Unité d'Habitation* (1952), the project represents Le Corbusier's vision for housing after of a long period of obsession with the "vertical garden city" both as an idea for a self-sufficient complex (like a boat at sea) and as an ideal of the modern architect's role as a social philosopher (surely due to Fourier's phalanstère/familistère¹⁰ utopian vision for society and morbid curiosity about the experiments of the soviet avant-garde).

The aphorism is designed from a single "legement prolongé" on top of audacious "pilotis" enclosing shelter for 1600 people, in a 17-story composition of 337 two-level apartments, (socially) condensing the neighbourhood complex of multiple unit buildings from the 1800's into a single block containing all necessary amenities¹¹. The principles of design aimed at a conjunction of immaterial and material toolkits, disposed as a set of inspirational Christian and Socialist dynamics as a response to the post-war housing shortage, and a physical model for future urban development and urban living¹².

Although it was intended to promote a sense of community, its monumental scale and standardised design created social and physical distances between city, residents and visitors, undermining the collective life it was intended to promote (Moos 1979). The building's isolation from *Marseille's* traditional urban fabric further contributed to this disconnection, exposing the contradictions in Le Corbusier's approach by disregarding the complex experiences of individuals (Cohen 2013).

At the age of 65, perhaps due to a lack of empathy (or from a clear personal fault in his personality), the architect's intentional design of the social programme exacerbated the questions it sought to answer.

10 Phalanstère etymology: <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phalanst%C3%A8re>

11 Library, post office, shopping centre, hotel, restaurant, club, clinic, gym, running-track on the roof, swimming-pool/baths and school are defined within the vertical structure of the property.

12 The concept of a 'vertical garden city' reduces urbanism to a formulaic approach, favouring efficiency and order over the nuances of social interaction. The standardised units and communal amenities, while intended to foster a cohesive social environment, have frequently resulted in feelings of alienation and isolation derived from functional verticality that has imposed a rigid social hierarchy, with the lower floors being perceived as more desirable due to their proximity to the ground. During my most recent visit, I observed the deterioration of the initial programme. Public spaces have become a form of musealisation and ritualisation that deviates from the idyllic vision of the architect. Commercial spaces were either unoccupied, closed, or even abandoned. The overall ambience of the building evoked a sense of a decaying social structure, serving as a cautionary reminder rather than an exemplar of successful urban design.

Socio-political implications

Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation* in Marseille demonstrates that modernist design ideology reflects social disconnection.

This affirmation is precisely how the *Unité* functions as an ontological device, representing a physical manifestation of a theme variation from the modernist ideology manifesto.

The project is indicative of his unwavering fixation on technology and standardisation as drivers of progress and with the assumption that architectural forms will influence social conduct. It materialises the inherent contradictions in modernist architectural theory and practice, on how the aspiration to establish a new social order through design often results in a top-down structural paradigm that fails to adequately address the needs and preferences of the inhabitants.

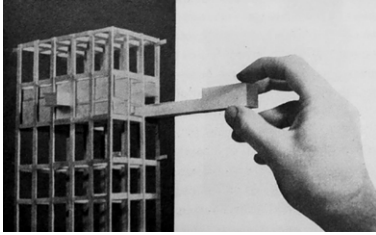
The building's detachment from *Marseille's* urban context serves as a clear example of this autocratic phenomenon. The traditional public spaces that were once integral to the city, including squares, boulevards, and markets, have been replaced by a closed sense of community that effectively isolates residents from the wider social and cultural life of old city. Reflecting a broader issue within modernist architecture, the prioritisation of abstract principles over the consideration of everyday lived realities, negates the understanding of space production as an inherently political process shaped by power relations that are frequently overlooked in the design process (Lefebvre 1991). The design of the vertical community imposed a specific social order, which, although well-intentioned, ultimately served to reinforce existing hierarchies and alienate residents from the city and perhaps even from themselves.

An actual representation of our time, today!

We must think (again) about how architecture affects social behaviour and (continue to) find ways to be more inclusive from context-sensitive approaches. We must accept our own porosity and doubt as constructive tools for architectural design by engaging non-disciplinary narratives to reassess and tackle social and environmental issues, across different areas of expertise and balancing the necessary disciplinary factors in the process.

This is why using no exclusively heuristic approaches activate communities to recognise contemporary concerns simply because the comprehension of the nuances that influence architectural design on social conduct are easier in acknowledging the significance of contextual factors, diversity, and inclusion (Schön 1983) and not because they are disciplinary able.

What is the answer: the building itself, the architect's vision, the underlying agenda, the discipline, or the practice? It also prompts consideration of whether the use of low-cost materials, and "immaterials" in social housing affects the longevity and (i.e.) financial sustainability of residents;



whether such impacts were anticipated beyond the project's initial goals and intangible factors as design considerations. In this case, the lack of an “extra-disciplinary” approach sheds light on why the original vision failed (perhaps rooted in the simplistic assumption that private transportation and long distances were essential for urban growth as Corbusier always dreamt of) resulting in social segregation rather than proposing cohesion.¹³

Unité exemplifies individualistic urban design, characterized by an artificial sense of porosity and rooted in displacement rather than organic continuity and historical integration. While it reflects genuine modernist ambitions, it also serves as a *cautionary tale* about the dangers of imposing “cartesian social structures” from a detached, top-down perspective. The case vigorously emphasises the need for decisions to emerge from the participatory ecology of society rather than the “sterile” environment of a studio.

In face of 21st-century socio-environmental challenges, it is vital to explore alternative positions and methodologies, prioritising heuristic needs over formal ideals.

13 Despite the urban expansion of Marseille encroaching upon the site, the sense of isolation and counter-design persists in the manner that the main avenue's contrast with the complex's entrance from the city and connection to the adjacent *quartiers*.

[Fig. 4]
1947 Model of the Unité d'Habitation showing insertion of dwelling units into structural grid in: Le Corbusier: Elements of a Synthesis. Stanislaus von Moos

[Fig. 5]
2024 In between light and shadows. Unité d'Habitation. Marseille, France. author's photograph

Historical Continuity and Cooperative Practices: Bairro da Malagueira

Context-sensitive architecture

The socio-political landscape of post-revolutionary Portugal underwent a profound transformation following the Carnation Revolution of 1974. The country transitioned from a long-standing dictatorship to a fervent (though brief), communist state. The shift significantly reshaped political dynamics, leading to an emphasis on addressing social issues, particularly on the urgency for affordable housing.

In response to severe shortages caused by rural-urban migration, the government's answer prioritised the creation of cooperative ownership models, mostly grounded in Marxist-Leninist ideals of fair distribution of resources and empowerment of the working class, exploring social housing models through the lens of collective collaboration and community engagement.

At the age of 44, Álvaro Siza's professional background was characterised by a practice focused on small houses and direct commissions from his family's influential connections (and some of his teachers). In stark contrast with the political and social events that lead to the popular upheaval (and despite his privileged practice), he began to take interest in social housing models shortly before the revolution.

Álvaro Siza's work on the *Malagueira* locality in 1977 arose during that time of deep reflection on the transformative potential of architecture in his life and in the Portuguese society, emphasising Siza's integration of communal design despite extreme political shifts in post-revolution Portugal.

He was also a widower.

The architect envisioned a high-density, two-storey housing complex designed to integrate seamlessly with existing neighbourhoods, serving as a pioneering experiment in cooperative living. Departing from Le Corbusier's authoritarian modernism, it embraced north European cooperative models, fostering resident ownership and active participation in the design process.

The 20-year project faced significant challenges, notably the abandonment of key public facilities, such as commercial streets and an acoustic shell, which weakened its connection to the urban context and vibrant community life. Despite these setbacks, the adaptation and constant change that emerged became defining elements of Siza's project. From a non-disciplinary perspective, these events functioned as design tools, reshaping disciplinary boundaries and underscoring Álvaro Siza's enduring political engagement with the community.



Amid shifting politics, Siza avoided rigid dogma. His porous framework allowed *Malagueira* to endure and this strong connection (nourished by his frequent travels to Évora) demonstrates how the architects integrated the socio-environmental complexities into their practice (the decision to reside in the neighbourhood revealed that choosing certain personal conditions significantly influenced the design process) which can be seen as precursors to a heuristic system.

This precise posture exemplifies the potential for embracing multimodal design and transcending dominant narratives is a personal choice, advancing a more inclusive politics of production within the domain of an architectural practice. *Malagueira's* experiences support a broader argument that architecture must address not only socio-environmental crises but also the underlying ideocultural crises inherent to contemporary practices. In contrast with *Unité's* case, *Malagueira* would not have survived under a totalitarian design regime, even if the architect had made suggestions along those lines on occasion¹⁴.

Unlike *Unité d'Habitation's* alienating uniformity, *Malagueira* embraced Lefebvrian "lived space," prioritizing socio-cultural nuance and unpredictability over abstraction.

¹⁴ "The plan is quite regulated. The regulation is, if you will, tyrannical. But with the understanding that the limits, fortunately, present to tyranny lead to subversion. However, this subversion can have, or may find, a framework. In reality, this already happens today, for example, in the treatment of gardens, walls, and even colour, where there is also regulation, but there is constant subversion. What I intended was to create very precise limits for spontaneous intervention, knowing from the start that this rigor does not translate into practice because there is a desire to be different that overcomes everything. But if there is not a framework of relative solidity, it leads to the chaos that we find in so many areas of the country, in so many parts of our territory. So, I believe there is a balance here and also good sense from the Évora City Council's administration, where there is never a tyrannical confrontation, but rather a kind of alert. I personally intervene in this because, as most of the houses there are built by cooperatives, I have very direct contact and constantly raise the alert: Hold on, that garden looks wonderful with the cement lions. But if everyone starts putting cement lions, we go back to the same. In other words, subversion can become regulation, and that's when the result is terrible. I believe there is a balance between the rigidity or strength of the regulation and the plan and the openness to occupation by the users. That is the objective." 1996 Program Name: Quinta da Malagueira - Ver Artes - time: 16:06 Álvaro Siza Vieira - Author: Manuel Graça Dias. Director: Edgar Feldman.; translation by the author

[Fig. 6]

1996 frame: Programa Ver Artes. Quinta da Malagueira. Image: Álvaro Siza

Cooperative principles

At the time, the project's objective was to enhance the landscape of *Évora*. However, there was a risk that it would exacerbate the challenges already facing a compromised urban area. The objective was to establish a new community, connected by residents through a cooperative organisation and linked to the city by means of key design features oriented by the adjacent city. The architect devised a high-density, two-storey, back-to-back housing complex that harmonises with proximate communities, prospective developments, and the historic setting of *Évora*. The integration of the new development into the existing urban fabric was achieved by simple elements (streets, ducts, ditches), along with the incorporation of the public infrastructure that directed itself at the existing urban layout. The design prioritised evolution, adaptation, and progression, allowing for interaction between the typologies (named as "evolutive") and the needs of the residents. This framed the project as an ongoing product rather than a static solution, prevailing even when some public programs (commercial street and auditorium), were not constructed.

That proposed commercial street, sought to create an idea of an autonomous community that would evoke the vibrant life of the old city. Like the mid-height efforts in *Marseille*, it could cultivate a self-sufficient environment maintaining the residents of *Malagueira* with trading opportunities in the historic town, from a polycentric urban strategy. Comparably, the acoustic shell/auditorium was designed to serve as a central feature promoting civic engagement and collective activities and is clearly reminiscent of Corbusier's sculptural works. It was Siza's original (sculptural) centrepiece for the main triangular square, as a geometric form defined by a ground colonnade, intended to foster civil participation and facilitate communal events.

The general design was inspired by the memories of simple, rural houses enhancing compositional complexity without merely juxtaposing vernacular models' side-by-side. It sought to maintain spatial and financial control over extreme scales (urban necessities and interior dimensions) while drawing from erudite classical and modernist influences. The infrastructure was divided into two distinct layers: one situated at ground level for the purpose of accommodating roads and canals, and another located above ground level for the distribution of water and electricity via dedicated ducts. This decision, while controversial, was defended by the architect on the grounds that it represented a cost-effective solution in comparison to underground alternatives.¹⁵ Questionable, the decision for the high standing infrastructure design mirroring the old aqueduct, reflects the architect's intent to pursue historical aesthetic contexts as a constant awareness of the medieval and historical city.

¹⁵ An example of a possible heuristic decision influencing architectural design through collaborative practices or just a manipulative way to impose a design exclusive feature.

The project echoes the urban ideas of permanency from monuments as a critic to functionalism (Rossi 2001), particularly in how the aqueduct functioned as an urban *operatore* – absorbing, negotiating, and influencing both old and new developments.

It is mostly from the connection to the historical aqueduct of Évora that *Malagueira* illustrates how the city accepts both its legacy and its future (which the new Bairro da *Malagueira* similarly embraced in its housing complex lexicon). From contrast and contradiction, the architect's potential to influence the history and transformation of a place through design is viewed as a continuous process of reflection rather than an isolated moment in the site's history. A continuous impact that must be approached from an ethnographic perspective, emphasising a practical understanding of the site and allowing for a design aimed at concrete explorations beyond mere "housing projects". Álvaro Siza's approach reflects both a comprehensive understanding of the context and at the same time his operational range outside traditional disciplinary boundaries by engaging professional practice with a personal connection¹⁶.

Compared to Corbusier, Siza's design approach was more diverse and flexible. While Corbusier imposed a strict socialist ideology, Siza integrated a communist cooperative model, treating occupants as contextual groups rather than imposing rigid ideals. Corbusier used the post-war context to push his totalitarian agenda, whereas Siza focused on the historical and evolving nature of the site, aiming for integration rather than mere change. Siza's design for *Malagueira* aimed to create a sense of open continuity, respecting the historical context and embracing transformation. His design philosophy disobeys the soviet social mandate and reflects a profound comprehension of Évora's socio-cultural context, emphasising material and immaterial flexibility and adaptability. Seen as a continuous process whereby the design is shaped by the ongoing engagement with a site's eventful and socio-cultural context without falling in the constraints of social housing models.

Malagueira project shows how architecture can bring transformative change when approached from a non-disciplinary perspective. Personal connection is a concrete design tool and Siza's position denounces how this can be achieved via "collective memory and a confrontation of a counter-pastoral view of modernity" (Mota 2014). His practice makes visible the "disciplinary codes and conventions" in specific contexts enabling a porous landscape to be

¹⁶ The political and financial climate necessitated a design characterised by frugality, and simplicity, leading to core decisions like the absence of ornamentation. However, this simplicity evolved throughout the project, as various aesthetic enhancements were introduced, raising the perceived costs. This shift may reflect a mechanism of sacralisation, driven by both the architect and stakeholders aiming to transcend the initial project brief, in response to Siza's erudite approach. This evolution highlights a contradiction between the intended simplicity of the aesthetic and probably due the architect's background in intricate detailing and specialized craftsmanship.

affected by conditions of social, environmental and notions of disciplinary dogmas through formal knowledge masterfully refusing to advocate the obsolescence of those mediums. Consequently, his “personal practice” acted as a membrane, permeating the narrative in which we are constructing our ever-modern habitat. Despite seeming otherwise, Siza's acknowledgment of the importance of contingency in heuristic systems went beyond banalisation of participatory design and while remaining autonomous, he acted in conjunction with the potential opportunities of the collective experiment. He chose to learn rather than to teach to better dominate the solutions of a future time.

The possibility for conflict should also be considered as the normal process of resistance from disciplinary/non-disciplinary perspectives may arise. Nonetheless, and closely mediating that process, the context of divergent design as a facilitator should be present, denying “hegemonic relations and the rhetoric of binary polarities” even from a more vulnerable position when exploring behavioural spaces that define the architect's position in society. Siza's project remains a benchmark for equitable urbanism, proving communal housing succeeds through empathy over ideology. By centering resident agency, he transcended fleeting political agendas, offering a timeless model for participatory design.

Almost clerically, Siza broadened the space in between disciplinary lessons and non-disciplinary learning.

Feminist and Participatory Futures: “La Borda”

Communal living

The disciplinary model of architectural discourse has typically been situated within a safer formal context, characterised by established norms and conventions.

From 1922 onwards, the conformity of a 'style' was evidenced through the principles of simplicity, functionalism, and global influence: the rejection of ornamentation, the preference for regularity over symmetry and the dominance of volume over mass became the defining characteristics of this style, which was widely accepted (Johnson, Hitchcock, and Massu 2001).

This model places particular emphasis on specific design principles, frequently marginalising practices that deviate from conventional narratives, inadvertently overlooking the considerable diversity of approaches that exist beyond the boundaries of mainstream paradigms (Hays 1998) and is in itself a mechanism for global conformation of practices in the last 100 years.

Rigid disciplinary constraints stifle creativity and innovation, undermining the profession's capacity to address contemporary socio-environmental challenges. Conversely, the necessity for non-disciplinary methodologies are logic reactions to the constraints of the disciplinary paradigm – reciprocated to the initial system of oppression. A growing discourse champions approaches that prioritise human experience and social context, demanding a critical scrutiny of urban space. For example, exploring how bodies are perceived within their social environments enables non-disciplinary narratives to broaden our understanding of architecture's role in societal transformation – challenging heteronormativity while addressing urgent socio-environmental concerns.

Since the early 20th century, Catalunya maintained a robust connection to the cooperative intricacies of collective and self-sustaining organisations. With an epicentre in Barcelona, cooperatives emerged as a response to the pressing need for coalition in the pursuit of a more equitable and progressive social context. Largely attributed to the region's highly industrialized economic structure, conditions resembling exploitation were crafted from a classist society excessively extracting human resources.

Fortunately, over the course of the 20th century, the movement evolved towards a democratic recognition of individual contexts and social needs of the population and by the early 2000s, the intensification of the political independence movement in Catalonia reinforced Barcelona's identity as a city committed to distancing itself from the conventional capitalist practices imposed by industrials and the central government in Madrid. In this ongoing struggle, a distinct revolutionary vocabulary has emerged, capturing the essence of the cooperative movement as a force that incites challenges to the established political order. This ideology actively engages participants by placing them within various power structures – political, economic, and social – in a cultural context while evolving the Northern European models from which cooperative movements originated.¹⁷.

17 *Andel* model (Scandinavian countries) model of access to housing located between purchasing and renting that integrates private initiative in a non-speculative market. (1866) *Wohnprojekte* model (Germany) a project of groups of people who cannot or do not want to resolve their housing demands (1970); *SostreCivic* model (Catalonia) a model of non-profit cooperatives where the ownership of the homes always falls in the hands of the cooperative and where its members participate and have indefinite and inheritable right to use the home based on a soft rent.

Ecological architecture

And still, tourism prevails...



...on both local and global levels, as a disciplinary approach that can address the ongoing struggle to overcome challenges that hinder understanding what is essential in housing. These issues significantly shape the discourse around universal social housing rights and inform design decisions.

The *La Borda* project serves as a contemporary tool for a heuristic reflexion on housing. Rather than being seen as a 'patient zero' of architectural innovation, it exemplifies a feminist argument that challenges patriarchal interpretations in the Western discipline. Although close to the capitalist paradigm, *La Borda* relies on co-ownership and co-management of spaces and resources, positioning the "sostre civic" project as a model of resistance.

Continuously influencing authors and residents, constructed as an unwritten piece of architecture, *La Borda* effectively conveys a narrative that illustrates how open methodological practices can translate into deeper, more meaningful meta discourses. By fostering a landscape of care from collectivism and addressing underlying issues in architectural practice, the building promotes ethical, political, and social change, supporting a culture of cooperation and ecological sustainability to overcome the prevailing socio-economic model.

[Fig. 7]

2024 Everybody "as" a place I. La Borda. Barcelona, Spain. author's photograph

Intersectional and transgressive, *La Borda* embodies an inclusive and permissive vision that encapsulates social consolidation through the dilution of factors such as race, gender, and class. It follows the notions of place and political time as a collective and participative operation (Massey 1994), and deviates from conventional disciplinary autonomy entering the state of critical tension with the institutional values that dominate the social ecosystem. Consequently, facilitates the emergence of new organic and dynamic heuristic dialectics, replacing traditional disciplinary forums with more fluid and collaborative modes of engagement, on the distance of society and disciplinary communities. It questions urban life from a distinct view on the modern habitat.



The building's event-based program (rather than a functional establishment of use) designs spaces that support and advise on the creation of communal projects, using an objective value-neutral system as the primary aim is to cooperate with local entities, groups, and individuals that consider gaining from this collaborative ethos. Underscoring the effectiveness of alternative models that challenge and transform existing market logics, empirical evidence (comfort, wellbeing and health) is used to critique modernism's commitment to normativity and conformity. Moreover, *La Borda's* formal envelope reflects the core aspirations of the collaborators (architects and owners), proclaiming community values through pragmatic choices in materials, techniques, and other intangible elements of the project's compositional system. Practical considerations, such as the duration of leases are carefully integrated into the design, serving equally as mechanisms for longevity - enabling "the building" to adapt to various needs, acting as an operable system that can respond to diverse questions beyond energy efficiency and spatial versatility.

[Fig. 8]

2024 Everybody "as" a place II. La Borda. Barcelona, Spain. author's photograph

A practice as an answer

Distinguishing the practitioner's approach from the resulting material product is nearly impossible. While autonomous, "the practice" is clearly dependent on the material outcomes that are produced as "the project". The relationship between practice and "the project of a building" is symbiotic and albeit the individual paths they may take, they remain reciprocal. This entanglement stands in stark contrast to traditional models that are often presented by "an author", usually totalitarian. *La Borda* elaborates on a delicate exit from the discipline of architecture while remaining deeply anchored in it by engaging the space in between field and practice, disciplinary and non-disciplinary.¹⁸

Radical approaches, such as those seen in *La Borda*, feed intangible relationships from the practitioners to the occupants who engage with the opportunistic potential of "a building", creating a continuous form (material and immaterial) that is opposite to the urban devices that reside in "a style". LACOL¹⁹, much like *La Borda*, exemplifies a methodology that transcends classical design. It embodies a blend of experimentation, responsibility, and divergent responses to contemporary societal needs, addressing unavoidable daily challenges as a vehicle for navigating the noisy state of social consternation and decay the values that founded the notion of socio-environmental care.

Visionary, the typological spaces designated for work and living are agnostic and grounded in common areas that encourage interaction and provoke unexpected collaborations. Such collaborative practices in housing (and architecture practice) are indistinguishable, understood as mutually supportive, deeply interconnected in their inputs and outputs, deriving from the social context into a cultural ethnography of thought. In contrast to the traditional model dominated by a totalitarian male architect, Lacol's systems of collaboration emerge from conscious feminist practices that of cooperation and participation, igniting change and critiquing entrenched dogmas and patriarchal norms.

Disciplinary non-models

Housing access can be approached through a hybrid model that diverges from traditional concepts of ownership and rental. A model that offers an alternative way and that is neither a purchase nor a rental but a dynamic connection to housing needs changes the importance of a plain brief. Paradoxically only a proper brief, as a very distinct strategy can change the actual tactics of the occupants away from the architect-centric assumptions of modernist models

¹⁸ Specifically highlighting the feminist and cooperative ethos of Lacol that in a way materialises Haraway's post-anthropocentric theory about traditional thought and broadening the understanding of the relations between the humans, non-humans, and the environment in a stimulative ethic of care.

¹⁹ Lacol is a cooperative of architects established in 2009 in the Sants district of Barcelona. Members: Eliseu Arrufat, Ari Artigas, Carles Baiges, Lail Davi, Cristina Gamboa, Ernest Garriga, Mirko Gegundez, Laura Lluch, Lluç Hernández, Pol Massoni, Jordi Miró, Arnau Andrés, Anna Clemente.

that have shaped much of Western urban life ideals. As an example, assuming a simple reduction in private spaces and amenities and favouring communal areas that enhance collective living, private spaces are minimized to the essential in favour of shared spaces (i.e. spare rooms for non-residents and visitors, collective kitchens, nurseries/childcare facilities, and central laundries). Simple stem derivations into empathy, solidarity and generosity as design tools escape endemic and systemic solutions and are open to accommodate i.e. elderly residents, providing spaces with support from other residents as they age, ensuring that the community remains inclusive and supportive across different life stages and generations. As a result, practical aspects as the duration of the lease and longevity of the investment become evident.

While this model bears some similarities to projects like *Unité*, particularly in concept, the key difference lies in the dynamics and organic connections within the social contract of a cooperative structure. In *La Borda*, the design is not just a physical manifestation, but an evolving reality, originated from the practiced design, intertwined with the daily lives and relationships of its occupants²⁰.

The pursuit of a pure and ideologically driven discipline may inadvertently strip away the autonomy and assertiveness needed to effectively characterise and engage with the modern world. It is crucial to recognise the profound responsibility and influence that architecture holds and how architects play a pivotal role in shaping the built environment. It is imperative to establish a thoughtful engagement with local heritage at the risk of creating homogeneous and generic spaces that lack cultural depth and diversity.

La Borda exemplifies a primal call to action, embodying collaborative efforts toward non-conformity, ideological commitment, and resistance. The project challenges the technical specialisation typically expected of architects by refusing to comply with traditional norms and by positioning housing as the most fundamental aspect of human existence—a realm often dominated by politicians and architects through totalitarian decisions. The social project highlights the loss of capitalist power among architects while simultaneously demonstrating the regaining of disciplinary power through cooperative and participatory design processes. This contradiction between the professional and personal sets of values and principles serves as proof of concept, disguised as an ethical call to action. Design should serve as the foundation for enacting the political dimensions of architecture, present in Lacol's confrontational projects, which aim to address core issues from a sensitive feminist perspective on the vocational role of architects. Lacol engages with feminist theory both individually and collectively, challenging the dominance of sex, race, gender, and class within the patriarchal status quo.

20 As an example, even the classification/lexicon used defines how the cooperative housing operates with various membership types that reflect different levels of involvement and commitment to the project: "The Inhabitant" (lives in the cooperative apartments, fully engaged in the daily life and responsibilities of the community); "The Expectant" (individuals interested in becoming residents, waiting for vacancies to become available); "The Partner" (supports the cooperative project, participating in events and activities but not living in the cooperative itself).



A shift in contemporary architectural practice marks a move towards Haraway's post-anthropocentric alliance diverging from the rational methodologies typically endorsed by academic institutions. Lacol embraces an intersectional and multimodal exploration of comfort, property, and participation between Haraway's human and non-human to Rendell's endeavour on feminist and interdisciplinary approaches to space in a practice that rejects traditional master over diversity, advocating for a more inclusive and bold relationship between people and the built environment as a way to rethink modernity.

Evolved architectural practices are not autonomous entities or fantasies; they are grounded in deliberate positions where design achieves both aesthetic effects and a concrete vision for equitable, inclusive spaces. Motivated by rejecting patriarchal domination, Lacol's search for alternatives to conservative conventions results in partnerships and contemporary approaches essential for understanding ecological, communal, and human/non-human dynamics more focused on sociology concept of social space and power dynamics as theoretical frameworks for the discussion of power in architectural education.

This acknowledgment is critical when considering the perspectives and needs of non-residents, who also interact with and are affected by these living experiments.

[Fig. 9]
2024 Nature "as" a place. La Borda. Barcelona, Spain. author's photograph

Erranting

Architecture has been guided by rigid disciplinary frameworks that rely on endemic, systemic, rule-based approaches, limiting the field's ability to address complex socio-environmental challenges.

These conventional methods, grounded in a system that Barthes describes as *studium*, focus on analytical and "detached observation" and fall short in navigating the evolving needs of our world by anchoring themselves to formal pedagogical devices.

Wandering allows architects to explore beyond established boundaries, "error", and to open themselves to non-disciplinary practices that may induce intuition, spontaneity, and emotional response. As an element of a intentional pursuit of a *punctum* incorporating heuristics facilitates the adoption of exploratory and highly adaptive tactics, using multimodal strategies to address diverse and complex design challenges.

Self-empowerment is achieved by liberating practice from traditional constraints through active engagement with modernity's socio-political dynamics. The examples of *Unité*, *Malagueira*, and *La Borda* illustrate how architecture can challenge and redistribute societal power: transforming the discipline into a heuristic tool free from exclusive critiques. Respectively, the cases illustrate architecture as a tool of resistance, either by cautionary tale on dominant narratives, by promoting prospective views on historical continuity or simply, by refusing to comply with dogma.

Architecture transcends mere technicality, emerging as a multimodal, cultural, and political practice that redefines power by integrating both material and immaterial elements in physical space. It must evolve beyond traditional construction to embody not only tangible structures but also intangible design expressions.²¹

As we face the collapse of traditional economic and political structures, this study advocates that architects reclaim their autonomy by adopting divergent, heuristic practices. By engaging with challenges like gentrification, commodification, and environmental degradation, architects can transcend conventional methods to design "in-between" spaces that are not only functional and aesthetically compelling but also adaptable to unforeseen uses and needs.

Much like light and shadow, disciplinary and non-disciplinary practices are entangled in a relationship of common interest, materially and immaterially, necessary for the progression of a system of production that positions the pedagogical recodification of the architect as an *other narrative* in response to the survival of the discipline of architecture.

I propose it as an *errante*: deriving, diverging, exploring and always, learning.

²¹ A public square is incomplete without the presence of people, who manifest their existence through intangible practices like assemblies and cultural events, and more open houses, prioritising human needs can accommodate residents, non-residents, visitors, and wanderers alike.

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