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VICTOR

From the neorealist reconstruction of post-war Italy and directed settlements in Spain to the SAAL experiment in Portugal, this exhibition presents a review of social housing that examines the ways in which architecture and social conflict intersect.

THE CITY IN DISPUTE

Collective experiments around
social housing in southern
Europe (1949-76)



04.03 – 04.06.2023

[LA VIRREINA]
CENTRE
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Ajuntament de
Barcelona



This exhibition presents a review of the history of social housing in southern Europe through a series of unique experiments carried out at various times of crisis, and which, in their own way, reinvented the paradigms of modernity and the relationship between architecture and its inhabitants. Practices in which communities played a key role when it came to defining their place in the city, and in which architects took on the challenge of reinventing worlds from below. Moments, in some sense exceptional, in which there was an articulation of the poetic rigour of design, the staging of urgent problems against the backdrop of minimum housing and the incarnate desire of bodies situated on the margins of history until that time.

From the neorealist reconstruction of post-war Italy and the avant-garde proposals for directed provisional settlements in Francoist Spain to the housing experiments that arose from the Carnation Revolution in Portugal, this exhibition examines the ways in which architecture and conflict intersect. Violence—as Ignasi de Solà-Morales would say—is inherent to architecture since every urban operation always imposes one reality at the expense of others. However, the examples addressed here were also built on the basis of a pre-existing social conflict, which gives them meaning. Recognising the various manifestations of these social processes as a constituent part of the history of architecture is the first step towards providing restitution for bodies forgotten by the modern paradigm and its weighty legacy.

Architecture always, or at least cyclically, sits on a tremor, that of the agitation of communities seeking a place, some future forms. Therefore, this exhibition does not present architecture as a pacifying response to revolutionary impulses, as a mediator or as the ultimate solution to a given problem. Here, it is a matter of rethinking it—this time within the framework of complex city formation processes—and repeatedly taking part in and generating not so much (or not just) solutions, but new problems, with their successes and failures.

It is always about doing something *again*, a formula that, as Ginevra Bompiani tells us, refers to the creative capacity of children through repetition: doing something that is always the same yet different every time. Take “a handful of chaos and

give it its small new form”, create, play with and challenge the city again (*di nuovo, de nuevo, de novo*).

FOREWORD

The constellation of architectures and gestures proposed by this exhibition is expressed from a southern European perspective so that attempts can be made to invoke the political power of ways of doing, which—even in their difference—share certain traits. As an archaeology of a recent past, the exhibition addresses a key period for the conception of the contemporary city in these latitudes: just 30 years—from the late 1940s to the mid-1970s—that define our modernisation. A period that encompasses both post-war reconstructions and conflictive transitions towards democracy, and in which the great housing crises caused by the territorial shifts of late capitalism led to the blueprints for urban operations on the peripheries of cities that continue to be perpetuated to this day.

In this sense, the proposed case studies are both a symptom and an exception. They materialise the desire at that time to put order into, to rationalise and to sanitise the pockets of poverty that had arisen on the margins of cities—the result of a mass exodus from the countryside to cities—through the development of increasingly effective techniques. However, these very cases elude speculative and homogenising dynamics by attempting to dignify miserable living conditions through the radical nature of forms impregnated with the roughness of daily life.

A NEW REALITY

The post-war period in Italy—and especially in Rome, the city where the cases in this exhibition are located—was a very fruitful moment when various practices intensively, and from different angles, trialled new ways of what forgotten communities devastated by the miseries of World War II and fascism

should look like. Architecture was also part of the neorealism that Cesare Zavattini would define as an “art of encounter”, mainly through the operations of INA-Casa, the first major social housing plan in southern Europe of the 20th century. Like cinema or literature, architecture became a laboratory of forms that echoed a certain popular imaginary through experimentation with organic arrangements, the adequacy of the domestic typology, and the treatment of open spaces.

Even so, the social complexity of the disinherited classes made the fit between them and certain forms very difficult, so conflict re-emerged. However, it was precisely that complexity that led to a new field where individual representation came to the fore. The transfers that took place between the world of the image and that of architecture meant that both disciplines went beyond their own competences by attempting to articulate the power of bodies that expressed their performative capacity to make a place (for themselves).

Borgata

The diminutive of *borgo* (village or suburb), *borgata* is the name given to a group of homes situated on the peripheries of Italian cities. Like its Spanish counterpart *poblado*, it has certain controversial rural connotations.

Under Mussolini’s fascist rule, *borgate ufficiali* (official *borgate*) were the proposal put forward not only to solve social housing problems, but also to house the poor left-wing communities expelled from the city centre as part of the hygiene-driven processes of *sventramento* (disembowelment) that destroyed entire neighbourhoods of Rome.

As described by the architect Italo Insolera, the *borgate* did not provide their inhabitants with shelter or protection. Rather, such spaces presented a homogeneous and alienating built environment, a desolating setting where, despite social and aesthetic misery, the joy of living exuberantly burst forth.

Una vita violenta

After his arrival in Rome in 1950, Pier Paolo Pasolini became captivated by life in the *borgate* on the outskirts of the city. They

were places where he found a culture with its own codes and violent contradictions, an expressive space outside the petty-bourgeois logic that governed the city centre. He lived with those neighbourhoods and loved and tirelessly portrayed their people, with passion and based on a deep knowledge of them. It was perhaps for that very reason that he was one of the most scathing critics of the urban transformations of Rome at that time. With the lucidity of a poet, he saw how the construction of that modern Rome annihilated the uniqueness of those ways of life as the new reality of cultural homogeneity irretrievably inundated the city.

Quartiere TIBURTINO, Rome (1950-56).

Architects: Ludovico Quaroni and Mario Ridolfi.

Collaborators: Carlo Aymonino, Carlo Chiarini, Mario Fiorentino, Federico Gorio, Maurizio Lanza, Sergio Lenci, Pier Maria Lugli, Carlo Melograni, Gian Carlo Menichetti, Giulio Rinaldi and Michele Valori.

INA-Casa

Also known as the Fanfani Plan (after the man behind it, the Minister of Labour Amintore Fanfani), this was the great national programme to build public housing and create jobs in Italy after the war, though it coexisted alongside other international reconstruction plans such as the UNRRA-Casas (the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration housing plan for the country).

Managed by a special body of the Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni (INA) and based on charitable principles, in keeping with the Christian Democrat government, the INA-Casa plan (1949-63) was financed in part by small contributions from workers' wages and salaries. In turn, it constituted a powerful mechanism for strengthening the formation of the republic after fascism.

Its architectural approaches, formulated largely by Adalberto Libera and reflected in various published manuals, reveal a clear reaction to the spatial homogeneity of the *borgate*, as well as an intention to articulate a new grammar for workers' housing.

Quartiere TUSCOLANO III, *Unità d'abitazione orizzontale*
(Horizontal Housing Unit), Rome (1950-54). Architect: Adalberto Libera.

Cronaca

The chronicle is a genre that Neorealism embraced as its own, a sign of the times, a way of explaining reality that aimed to establish a certain commitment to denouncing it.

But it was not just a matter of content. As Gilles Deleuze indicated, rather than representing a given reality, neorealism aimed at an always ambiguous, to be deciphered, reality.

In keeping with this, architects also constructed their accounts and not just with buildings but also with images. In the three documentaries presented in the exhibition, produced for the Tenth Milan Triennial, held in 1954, the architects Giancarlo De Carlo and Ludovico Quaroni participated as the scriptwriters of works that bear witness to the times, while projecting an urban scenario in the making and exploring the ability of architecture to inscribe the controversies of the technique in the public sphere.

Quartiere SAN BASILIO, Rome (1949-55).
Architect: Mario Fiorentino.

LIFE AROUND

The breeding ground for social unrest due to the shortage of housing and precarious living conditions was the periphery of large Spanish cities during the 1950s. Such unrest was so great that the Francoist regime could not ignore it. A whole series of operations were then set in motion which, always from a paternalistic perspective, offered the new working class minimum living conditions. The facilities that the dictator gave to nimble managers in order to solve this problem in Madrid intersected with the acumen and skill of young architects with a drive to modernise; it was from all of this that the unique directed provisional settlements experiment arose.

On the margins, modernity had found an ideal place for experimentation because, as happened in the case of the Madrid settlements, necessity welcomed the experiment. The inhabitants participated actively in the construction of their own homes, and alongside them were young architects and students willing to learn. They were all united by the shared hope for a new world, a new community, a new city, a kind of redemption through the simplicity of forms.

Built a few years before the explosion of developmentalism, the directed provisional settlements revealed a fundamental paradox that shaped Spanish history: how modernity sought different ways to insert itself into the heart of the dictatorship.

Stocktake of Poor Housing

In the 1950s and 60s, the *Comisaría para la Ordenación Urbana de Madrid y sus Alrededores (COUMA)* produced a stocktake of poor housing with the aim of controlling each and every one of the shanty dwellings built in the outlying areas around Madrid.

In addition to being an evident criminalisation of poverty (still a burning issue today), this vast archive reveals the extent to which the question of social housing is intrinsically linked to a kind of moral control of the populace.

In the small sample of entries in the stocktake shown in the exhibition, the harassment was borne mainly by women, the people left in charge of their homes and family during the daytime. A careful observation of the photographs in these records can give us clues as to the idiosyncratic nature of the authoritarian system in which they were taken, but also of the resistance contained in the slightest gestures.

El Pozo

El Pozo del Tío Raimundo, a settlement characterised by shanties and self-built houses to the south of Madrid, was a dusty place for those who “saw the city from their borderland as something to aspire to”, as the anthropologist Esperanza Molina would say. The charismatic and controversial Father



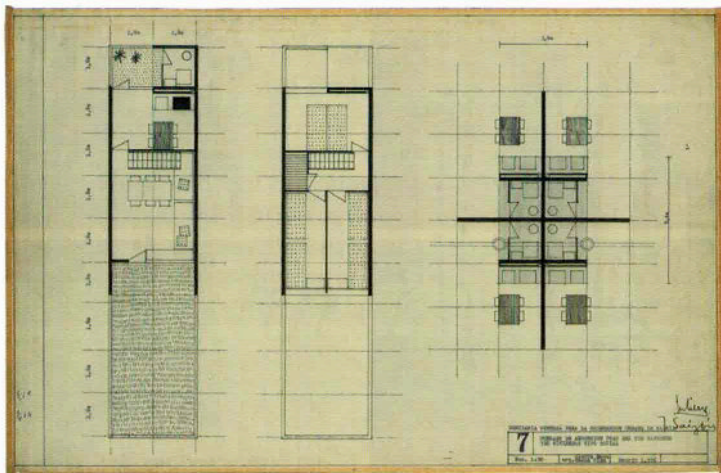
Italo Insolera, *borgata* Gordiani, Rome, 1959
© Anna Maria Bozzola Insolera



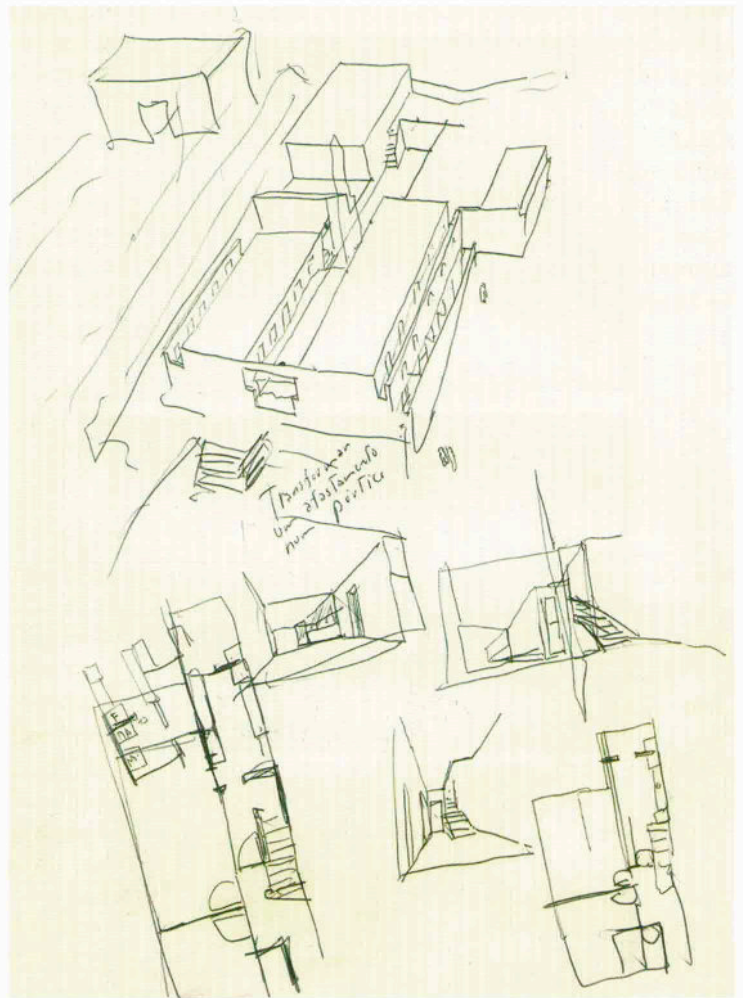
Stills from the film *Casa per il popolo* (Houses for the People), Damiano Damiani (1953, 9 min)



Martin Santos Yubero, inauguration of lighting in El Pozo del Tío Raimundo, Madrid, 1957. Regional Archive of the Community of Madrid. Cristóbal Portillo Fond



Francisco Javier Sáenz de Oíza and Manuel Sierra Nava, design of minimal housing for the provisional housing settlement of Entrevías and the settlement of El Pozo del Tío Raimundo, Madrid, 1956



Álvaro Siza, sketch for the SAAL operation of São Victor, Porto, 1974-76. The Drawing Matter Collection



Elvira Leite, pedagogical project carried out with the community of Largo da Pena Ventosa, Bairro da Sé, Porto, 1977. Collection of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Universidade do Porto

Llanos went to live there in 1955, accompanied by a group of university students and grassroots religious people who had given up their comfortable lives to work directly with the lower classes. The energy they brought, together with the drive of migrants from the south who had settled there, made El Pozo a veritable space for experimentation with forms of cooperation and solidarity in relation to the construction of housing and the town. Founded in 1957, the El Pozo Electricity Cooperative continues to distribute power at a lower-than-market price and is a good example of that direct management of one's own habitat.

Poblado dirigido de ENTREVÍAS, Madrid (1956-60).

Architects: Francisco Javier Sáenz de Oíza, Jaime de Alvear Criado and Manuel Sierra Nava.

SUT

The University Labour Service (SUT), founded by Father Llanos and associated with the Falangist Spanish University Union (SEU), allowed university students to get an insight into the harshest social reality of the Spanish territory by organising labour camps, literacy campaigns and Sunday work. The latter involved university students helping workers build their neighbourhoods, and they performed these tasks on Sundays and public holidays to be able to pay the percentage of their housing that was not subsidised by the so-called "personal benefit".

According to the former members, all future "left-wing thinkers of the country" went through the SUT, who embodied a shift that they felt was irremediable: from the paternalistic solidarity of Christian affiliation to the later action and support for workers' self-organisation, which precipitated the end of the SUT in 1968.

Poblado dirigido de ORCASITAS, Madrid (1957-66).

Architects: Rafael Leoz de la Fuente and Joaquín Ruiz Hervás.

Hele Module

Rafael Leoz, one of the architects of Orcasitas, a directed provisional settlement, decided to focus his career on research after his intense—and sometimes tortuous—experience with the settlement's construction and management. To that end, he created the Rafael Leoz Foundation for Research on and the Promotion of Social Architecture. Backed by the Francoist regime, it had international impact, especially in Latin America, where at that time the most radical social housing construction and self-build experiments were taking place.

The aim of the Hele module was to industrialise housing without foregoing high spatial variability. Although these inquiries seem to be situated at a logical point in industrial development at the time, they were not massively implemented in the end. The irreducible singularity of the very fact of inhabiting stubbornly insists on dodging its standardisation.

Poblado dirigido de CAÑO ROTO, Madrid (1957-63).
Architects: Antonio Vázquez de Castro and José Luis Íñiguez de Onzoño.

Small Congresses

After a trip to Madrid in September 1959, during which he visited some directed provisional settlements, Oriol Bohigas wrote to Carlos de Miguel—the then director of the magazine *Arquitectura* published by the Architects' Association of Madrid—bemoaning the isolation that existed between the architects of Madrid and Barcelona, and proposing the Small Congresses initiative. These meetings, which in some way followed the lead of Team X but from southern Europe's own perspective, were held between 1959 and 1968. In these, the architecture of the Iberian Peninsula was shared through specific topics of debate, and those interventions that took into account the historic fabric and popular architecture were valued. They had international speakers and were organised in different Spanish cities, except for the ninth edition, which was held in Portugal and coordinated by Nuno Portas, the future director of SAAL.

ARCHITECTURE AND REVOLUTION

How does architecture behave within a context where conflict has broken out, where the bodies, in their dissenting agitation, have taken over the city? In August 1974, a few months after the start of the Carnation Revolution in Portugal, the provisional government created SAAL (Serviço de Apoio Ambulatório Local: Local Ambulatory Support Service), led by the architect Nuno Portas. Formed by technical brigades, this service offered support to associations of *moradores* (dwellers) that had been set up in the heat of the revolution, with pressing needs for housing all over the country. That was when architecture moved to the rhythm of revolt: it became embodied, organised and acted *with* and *for* those in need, but it often crossed the fine line between popular and populism, too.

The SAAL process was very extensive and diverse, precisely because it dealt with the specific conditions of each local community. This exhibition focuses on the SAAL-Norte experiment, specifically on certain cases in Porto that posed urban regeneration problems inside the *ilhas* (akin to back-to-back houses) in compact neighbourhoods and with communities that, besides claiming the right to the city, demanded their right to the place.

The life of SAAL was short (just a couple of years), but records of those gestures, of those decisions, of that capacity to combine project and action remain. In short, an account of how fertile an agency between bodies that move and an architecture that shifts can sometimes be.

Ilha proletária

An *ilha* is a type of housing consisting of extremely small houses for migrants during early industrialisation. They were built within the block interiors of the homes of Porto's petty and middle trading bourgeoisies. The Portuguese term *ilha* means *island* in English. As the name suggests, they were spaces that isolated the population, but they nevertheless fostered a rich community life. The SAAL process was created in the wake of the Carnation Revolution, and its operations proposed to

open up—and not destroy—those hidden and marginalised interiors of the bourgeois city. The intention was to ensure that, once redesigned, they could be understood as the basis for the urban fabric of a society “that wanted to be classless”.

The *ilha proletária*—as Álvaro Siza called it—caused a small shift that, still loaded with the vocabulary of that time, may continue to resonate with us today. It sets out a position and impacts an area fraught with risk: that of contact between architectural practice and political action.

Operação SAAL do SÃO VICTOR, Porto (1974-76).

Architect: Álvaro Siza. Technical brigade: Domingos Tavares, Francisco Guedes, Adalberto Dias, Eduardo Souto de Moura, Graça Nieto, Manuela Sambade, Paula Cabral and Manuel Borges.

Nome Mulher

Between 1974 and 1976, the journalists Maria Antónia Palla and Antónia de Sousa directed the fortnightly television programme *Nome Mulher*, which dealt with the specific problems of women in this post-revolutionary period and addressed issues such as abortion, family planning, the right to vote, childcare, women prisoners, Angolan women, domestic or rural work and the fight for housing. The chapter entitled “Direito a habitação” (Right to Housing), produced by the filmmakers’ cooperative Cinequipa, focused on the role of women in the SAAL process as both technicians and residents. At that historic moment when the concept of citizenship was being redefined, women insisted on going beyond their material possibilities to achieve full citizenship through housing.

Operação SAAL do LEAL, Porto (1974-76).

Architect: Sergio Fernandez. Technical brigade: Vítor Sinde, António Corte Real, Emídio Fonseca, José Manuel Soares and Carlos Delfim.

Arquivo Alves Costa

The architect Alexandre Alves Costa—together with fellow architect Margarida Coelho and others—was a member of the co-ordinating committee of the SAAL-Norte. In the mid-

1960s, he worked with Nuno Portas on a study related to the systematisation and rationalisation of housing for workers. A militant anti-fascist, Alves Costas was strongly influenced by the riots of May 68 that he witnessed in Paris and Prague.

The most significant collection of photographs related to the SAAL are held in his archive. He himself did not take all of these slides and photographs, as instead people passed his camera haphazardly from hand to hand amongst themselves in order to keep a record of that urge to collectively construct not just houses but also assemblies, demonstrations, posters, situations and even the images themselves. The openness to the event that this collective urge gave rise to provides us with insights into the uncertainty of the times, a period that encapsulates the random chance inherent in every “throw of the dice”.

Operação SAAL das ANTAS, Porto (1974-76).

Architect: Pedro Ramalho. Technical brigade: Francisco M. Lima, Pedro B. Araújo, Lídia Costa, Augusto Costa, Vitor Bastos, Teresa Fonseca, José Lencastre and Aires Pereira.

Viaggio in Italia

As the new Portuguese State took shape after the Ongoing Revolutionary Process, the newly created institutions (such as the Ministry of Housing) gradually shelved the SAAL programme until causing it to be finally dismantled in October 1976. Prior to that, the programme had also been attacked by the far right. SAAL’s people power was associated with the exercise of direct (non-representative) democracy, but was unsustainable for the new social-democratic capitalist structure.

The architects Nuno Portas, Álvaro Siza and Alexandre Alves Costa went on a trip to Italy in 1977, in the middle of a period of intense mobilisation and violent confrontations called the “Years of Lead”, to share their experiences of SAAL. There, they presented the SAAL process in schools of architecture, where they had debates with teachers and students about the work of involving and accompanying communities in the construction of their own habitat or, in short, how to exercise and understand architecture as a political practice.

EPILOGUE

The end of SAAL caused a wave of frustration among many families who had participated intensely in the process and were thrown into the impossibility of improving their homes in the short and medium terms. In one of the poorest neighbourhoods of Porto, the historic Bairro da Sé, the artist and pedagogue Elvira Leite suggested to the community of Largo da Pena Ventosa that it should maintain, for a longer period of time, a certain spirit of struggle and action arising from a revolution that was already petering out. That was how she began an experimental project with the children of that community, which lasted for about two years. This involved them making collective proposals for things they could do on the streets, with very few resources and a lot of ingenuity. Thus, Leite placed emphasis on learning forged in the revolution movement: free and accessible education for all, based on listening and on developing everyone's individual skills and potential. Her practice of critical pedagogy could be understood as a precursor to the educational shift that, years later, would take place in the fields of art and architecture. Moreover, regarding the conception of the city, this small experiment raises the question of how use (or deviation from use, that is, *using differently*) is capable of making place, a place that persists tenaciously in the midst of (or despite) major urban and political transformations.

Lines of action of technicians as technicians

Álvaro Siza

It seems appropriate to give information about the Brigade, as a technical group, within the present political context. The Brigade does not adopt a simplistic position: learning with the people or teaching the people.

It intervenes with its real expertise, accepting and criticising the circumstances of how it gained such expertise, and with total adherence to an objective: placing control in the hands of the people over the degraded areas in which they live, and over the guidelines for their appropriation and recovery. From the outset, such control must be widened to the city itself and beyond.

(The fact that the Associations went beyond the objectives that gave rise to the SAAL Process is closely linked to the dynamics of the Portuguese revolutionary process, of which it was both the driving force and reflex action). The Brigade believes that its expertise and its ideas, within the apparent limits for "Habitat" reconstruction, in a dialectic relationship with the current ideas of the populations for whom it works, will form the basis of a physical world created for and by a society that wants to be classless.

The Brigade refuses to take the roads of imitation and ambiguity as they are narrow and demagogic.

The Brigade neither considers nor accepts that the urgency of the problems should be a limit on quality and poetry.

(Poetry seen as total adherence to and expression of the ongoing political process, in all its richness and complexity — a richness and complexity whose roots are found solely in a collective and irreversible popular movement). The Brigade tries not to confuse objectives and methods. Together with the Residents' Associations, it establishes the priorities for every particular moment, correcting them when necessary, and adopting a permanently critical position. From this perspective, every position must be taken as part of a dynamic process, with the adoption of a suitable methodology being indispensable. After completion of the bureaucratic and technocratic procedures comes a very different project concept. This concept must not have anything to do with improvisation or force.

Rigour is not a limit on the dynamics of the process.

Rigour must be linked to the real possibility of progress, to maturation, to the capacity to respond to the process, and ever present.

Rigour must be directly proportional to that capacity to respond.

Rigour is not a limit on the imagination.

Rigour is not a limit on collective creativity.

Rigour is the ability to respond to a dynamic process.

"QUALITY IS RESPECT FOR THE PEOPLE."

Che Guevara

Curators: María García Ruiz and Moisés Puente

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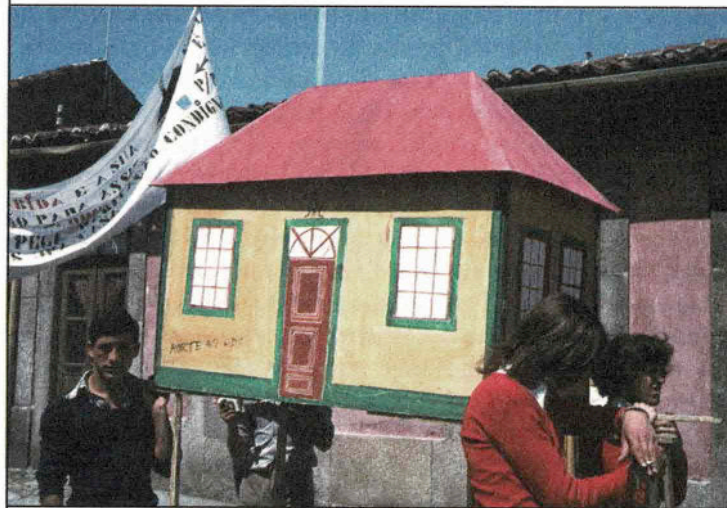
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