



Álvaro Siza Vieira sketchbooks for Malagueira: A critical reading about research through project

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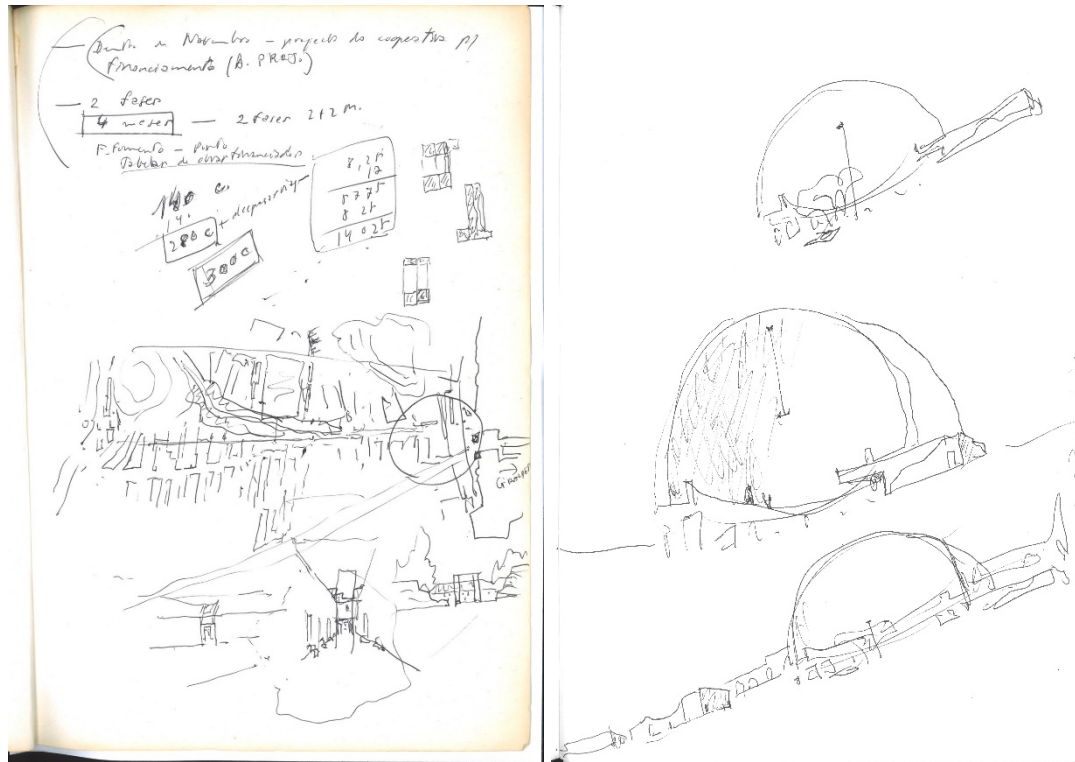


Figura 1. Page 2 from notebook 01 (March 1977) and page 35 from notebook 460 (March 1999)

Abstract

Álvaro Siza Vieira began the constant, methodical and continuous, almost compulsive, recording of drawings in A4 size drawing notebooks in March 1977 with the drawing of the Bairro da Malagueira project in Évora. This record, which spans over 22 years, allows us to understand his conception and design process, and reflects the ability of drawing to serve as a tool for investigation through design. This type of record, far beyond the record of the real usually made in a travel notebook, constitutes an essential testimony of the author and the work, but also of architecture and its conception process.

The research is centred in 48 notebooks dedicated to Malagueira and presents the indications of a research process centered in the observation and design of the territory and in the imagination of its future as a basis for the progressive construction of an urban plan, of its moments and elements. Based on this knowledge it is possible to affirm the character of drawing to bring together elements from the field of history and architecture that are close to the place and the themes of the ongoing project.

Drawing brings together the possibilities of the transformation of this memory at the service of the present in the construction of the future and the architectural project.

Key words

Álvaro Siza Vieira, Malagueira, Design Driven Research, Research by drawing

1. Opening

Álvaro Siza Vieira's (ASV) Malagueira Plan in Évora started in March 1977 and with this project began a constant, methodical and continuous, almost compulsive, record of drawings in A4 notebooks. These notebooks remain a remarkable resource for research and for understanding the working method by ASV.

The object of this research are 48 different notebooks, listed between March 1977 and the end of March 1999, that gather throughout 22 years the design of the Malagueira's project including housing, public buildings, and public spaces.

These drawings, in addition to the final documents of the projects, show the author's intentions and the path in design followed from the first initial sketch to the last detailed drawing. Throughout these drawings ASV we can realize an ethical commitment to the construction of a memory based in an intuition and sensitivity of a new architecture within the context of the nearby pre-existing city of Évora.

He gathers elements from the field of history and architecture in his notebooks that are close to the place and the themes of the ongoing project. He brings together the possibilities of transforming the site's memory at the service of the present for the construction of the future.

Álvaro Siza states in 1994 "it was difficult for the gaze to conquer the necessary discipline: to see everything and receive (a mark like red-hot iron), to leap in a methodical choreography" (Siza and Morais, 2009, p. 139). This discipline is evident in the path of the initial idea, or of the "primary generator in a generator-design-analysis model" (Darke, 1978), which ASV collects and envisions in his notebook.

The sketches of what he observes within the territory, conjugate the history of the place, the materiality that he feels and observes while walking through the city of Évora, but also the memories of the classical and modern past of European urban exemplars of the post-war period.

2. Plot

We put forward the hypothesis that drawing is an operative, valid tool, and method to research thru design in, on & about architecture and thus is still imperative to teaching.

The ongoing research¹ and the already published articles (Brito et al., 2021; Guilherme, 2016; Guilherme et al., 2021; Guilherme and Salema, 2021, 2020) share evidence that ASV's drawings act as a method for architectural research thru the architectural design, as a way of thinking and analysing the various possibilities of the project. The mutations pursued or abandoned suggest complex reasoning that follow Alexander's tree (1965) and cannot reproduce but elude categorization.

The semi-dome (Guilherme and Salema, 2020) is a

clear example where ASV tests not only the physical positioning and the urban relation of a major iconic public building at the centre of Malagueira, but also its social and cultural positioning in the identity definition of the neighbourhood itself and in the relation with the historical city. Drawings induces a research narrative for critical thinking.

An aggregative theoretical discourse positions the design of ASV as a process of investigation through design (Schön, 2003; Till, 2011, 2005) and in Design Driven Research (DDR²). The research followed by ASV, narrated through the drawings he elaborates in his notebooks, is assumed as an experimental investigation on form, light, history and architecture. The project is a laboratory (Guilherme and Rocha, 2013) of investigation and drawing is the laboratory tool that tests the various hypotheses of composition.

As ASV says: "Drawing is the language and the memory, the way to communicate with oneself and with others, the construction. He does not draw for the demands of architecture (it is enough to think, to imagine). It draws out of pleasure necessity and vice." (Siza and Morais, 2009, p. 137) This language and memory towards himself indicates an essential materialisation between thinking and conceiving architecture, anticipatory of construction. It is in the multiplicity and variety of drawn experimentation that resides the investigation and the process that transcends the graphic work to the architectural tool.

3. Spectacle

The role of drawing is often misinterpreted, as images, models, and visual rhetoric serve as architectural non-verbal thought, as knowledge production, as exploration of design solutions, as well as, in communicating its findings.

Yet, science presumes verbal as the most appropriate and legitimate way to communicate and to produce scientific knowledge. But design and architecture knowledge rely mostly on non-verbal thought, such as visual thinking and representation, to further advance in research and knowledge. Images, models, physical making are essential for researching in architecture (Scientific thinking + visual and verbal rhetoric) and exploration of design solutions as well as in communication of knowledge and its findings (Thomas, 2018; Thomas and Hobhouse, 2019).

Drawing is therefore a relevant method to architects, as a creative tool for project innovation through critical, practical, and theoretical consideration about the visible. Different kinds of visual imagery are used to describe the circumstances and materials, contexts and intentions and serve as a privileged space for research and capture conceptual ideas. Drawing is an integrative process linking

¹ *Malagueira: Heritage for all. Contributions for the its nomination. PTDC/ART-DAQ/32111/2017*

² *Design Driven research, derives from Research by Design, following CA2RE work.*

architecture as an instrument, process, and apparatus for researching, practice and teaching in dialogue with others.

This is certainly not the architect's only tool for conception, but it is one that, due to the speed of technology, has fallen into disuse, underestimating and undermining architect's ability to think, look and see, which is essential for the richness of the transfer of the project's becoming into something tangible and measurable (in construction).

4. Closing

ASV brings together in its notebooks drawings that have several purposes that illustrate and give emphasis to drawings as a tool for architectural research. They provide knowledge (of the territory, history, and architecture) to think (on architectural design revealing creativity and innovation), for analysis (geometric and referential metric, humanized and inhabited by man) with a focus on construction (because it serves the purpose of building and seeks, at various scales, represent the materiality of architecture).

We conclude that it is possible that ASV and its process can exemplify how to generate research through the project, to consolidate the practices of architectural teaching and the discipline of drawing, through a practice and can be replicated as a pedagogical experience carried out by students and teacher of architecture.

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All drawings were made by Álvaro Siza Vieira and are used with the courtesy of Drawing Matter Collections, Álvaro Siza Archive, 1977.