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2 The New *Fado* of the Students

Proximity between Utopia and Architecture Education

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Introduction

The world changed on a Thursday in May 1968. This global social revolution was also felt in Portugal, where its energy permeated cities, streets, schools, and the Portuguese people. The country of *fado* and of *retrotopia* was preparing to break free from a dictatorship that had lasted more than 40 years (1933–1974), and the Portuguese reality was on the brink of transformation.

This change arrived in Portugal, also on a Thursday, in April 1974, when the country's reality, regime, education, and way of life reached the utopia once envisioned by the people. These were times of experimentation, mistakes, learning, and making a difference.

Architecture was active on all fronts, responding to the prevailing atmosphere both in education and in practice, broadening its horizons with a radical posture and critical discourse. The time had finally come to turn dreams into reality and to achieve goals by bringing Architecture closer to the people and utopia to reality.

Although the potential of utopia in education has been recognized, and despite some occasional theoretical references, this concept remains largely absent from the curriculum of Architecture courses in Portugal. The same is true for the practice of radical pedagogies, which, interestingly, are now being revived outside of Academia, led by professors from Architecture schools ([Correia, 2018](#)).

The proximity between utopian and radical thinking in Architecture education gave rise to pedagogical experiences that marked the last significant innovation of this type in this context ([Colomina, 2014](#)). Today, the importance revisiting these ideas has gained traction, highlighting the need for a paradigm shift that reexamines these concepts – now distant from each other and from universities – and emphasizes the urgency of their (re)approximation through a deeper understanding and validation of their potential.

Today, the theme of the Local Ambulatory Support Service – *Serviço de Apoio Ambulatório Local* (SAAL) – is more relevant than ever, being considered both revolutionary Architecture and radical pedagogy. However, contemporary Architectural pedagogies are often described as “boring” and “dull” ([Colomina, 2014](#), 54:00). Have the utopians lost the ability to (re)imagine radically different futures, even in education? Or have they simply lost the capacity to dream, let alone make dreams come true?

Proximity between Revolution and Utopia: The Role of the Schools of Architecture

(...)yesterday's problems are still the problems of today, with one significant difference: in the 1970s there was hope, there was a sense of the future (...)

[Bandeira & Faria \(2014, p.193\)](#)

In May 1968, Paris witnessed a momentous shift as the impossible was demanded and imagination took power.¹ Social movements across Europe armed themselves with utopia to confront the economic, political, and social crises, leading to the rise of student movements that sparked a worldwide social revolt. The student-based revolution, which offered a new vision of both society and the world, marked the May 1968 crisis (May 2 to July 23) as a pivotal moment in the revitalization of utopia ([Vieira, 2020](#)). Students, seeking not power but the transformation of society and the world, emerged victorious. By redefining the boundaries of the possible, they hanged the world – a change we still benefit from today.

Portugal also became a stage for these student revolts, where students rejected the pedagogies of Fine Arts, criticizing the school's methods and curriculum for failing to address the relationship between Architecture and both social diseases and contemporary policies. They demanded that their studies reflect a vision of a new social order.² Students, teachers, and architects gathered at the II Study Meeting and National Meeting of Architects to think of – and act on – the future of the Architectural training and the restructuring of Academia ([Moniz, 2010](#)). They argued that “the University of the future should be critical and based on a large flexibility within teaching programs, in which student participation will be of crucial importance”³.

In this atmosphere of revolutionary excitement, Architecture fused with politics, and countercultural social movements and radical avant-garde artistic groups emerged worldwide, seeking alternatives and exposing narratives of utopian nature. These imperfect and short-lived utopias transformed the urban environment in response to the new social desires. Architecture became critical, introducing new experiences that engaged in discursive activities grounded in critical thinking and in dialogue that questioned the practice itself.

This revolutionary and visionary influence of Architecture reached the classrooms through magazines introduced by teachers and through an experimental regime – a pedagogical experience – created and implemented in Architecture schools ([Moniz, 2010](#)). In 1970, the schools in Lisbon and Porto underwent an innovative and radical reform ([Bandeira & Faria, 2014, p.11](#)), that encouraged “a certain liberty in teaching methodologies, in a time of fearless experimentation” ([Bandeira & Faria, 2014, p.73](#)). These were times to question the present, where “the past and the future seem to be in communion” ([Bandeira & Faria, 2014, p.79](#)), and when the social/political role of the architect awaited the Revolution to prove itself ([Moniz, 2010](#)).

These pedagogical experiments, which played a crucial role in shaping the discourse and practice of Architecture during the second half of the 20th century, are understood as Radical Architecture practices, and they are radical in the

truest sense of the word – rooted in the Latin term *radix* (Colomina, 2014). These pedagogies challenge the foundations of Architecture, with a discourse – now dormant – that emerges through a contested Architecture and questions the matrix of teaching. Education positioned itself as a vehicle for subversive actions, promoting new alternative visions through progressive pedagogical initiatives (Colomina, 2014).

The proximity between the architect and the society became unquestionable, especially during a time of political, social, and economic crisis, when 25% of the Portuguese population in mainland territory was living without basic conditions (Alves, 2017). This political and social involvement of architects with the city was manifested in schools through the “refuse of drawing”, leading to the “dignification of the subject” and the “legitimization of the creative act” (Bandeira & Faria, 2014, p.107). The school was in crisis (Moniz, 2010), and this crisis was intertwined with various fights – the fight for the Right to the Place⁴, the Right to Housing, the Right to The City as articulated by Henri Lefebvre, and the Right to Identity (Fernandez, 2014).

Thus, Architecture became a hymn to the revolution, seen as an essential tool for improving people’s lives and for the social transformation of the city, making the architect’s role crucial in society. With the same desire to change the world, the country of fado began its preparations for the anticipated revolution, which would arrive five years later. Freedom came to Portugal, also on a Thursday, through the struggle for democracy, culminating in the Revolution of April 25, 1974. At that moment, experimentation became the key approach, and this change presented an opportunity to innovate and experiment (Portas, 2015).

Proximity between People and Utopia: The Role of Architecture Students

To understand the Portuguese, you must understand “fado”, the typical Portuguese entertainment. The musical expression of a basic characteristic of the people: the belief that life has destined and nothing can change it. Fado means “fate”. The Portuguese believe that things which are going to happen, will happen, and that is that. There’s a fatalistic attitude, one the Portuguese accept with good humor and good grace.

Dias & Chaves (2007, 02:26)

Portuguese Architecture sought to change the world before being changed by it (Nadais, 2009), and Portugal was about to change. On August the 6, 1974, SAAL was born⁵ – a case of participatory experimentation⁶ within the national territory. The Revolution of April 25th and the “Revolution of the Right to Housing”, fundamental in the (re)definition of Nuno Portas’ program, ended the prolonged anticipation that had existed since 1968⁷ (Portas, 2015). This experience had already been preceded by preparatory processes and actors, leading to its rapid and implacable implementation.

The “Architecture of April 25th” emerged as a counterpoint to alternative industrial growth models, contributing to the strengthening of the popular

movement in urban areas – the *Poder Popular* – and laying the groundwork for increasingly advanced struggles (Bandeirinha, 2007). New houses and infrastructures were built, and several buildings were occupied for new social and cultural programs to support communities. Whether designed as an emergency service to contain the population's revolt, a progressive measure encouraging mobilization for better living conditions, or a combination of both, the SAAL process sparks opinions that are sometimes contradictory, sometimes convergent.

Created as a School of Fine Arts of U.Porto (ESBAP) laboratory, this utopia was “a process so credible and so frightening that had to be stopped” (Bandeirinha, 2007, p.260). However, it left no doubt that the most significant novelty of this experience was the empowerment and the proximity of people to Architecture (Portas, 2015).

In Porto, where SAAL was a standout, this pedagogical approach had already been mapped out before the revolution, through a utopia that utilized students as essential tools for its realization. The school and the students, mainly in Porto, played a crucial role in this process. The SAAL experience enabled professors and students to test political and disciplinary convictions that went beyond academic practice, allowing them to finally engage with the people and act on their reality.⁸ This experiment involved 176 students, who participated in 69% of all projects, 17 of which were built, involving brigades composed mainly of students (Conselho Nacional do SAAL, 1976).

Student involvement was not limited to Architecture. It extended to neighbourhood surveys, promoting the new program, and electing an architect for each intervention. Architecture students were at the forefront of protests – in person and through the production of posters in popular ateliers in the school – in the occupation of buildings, the organization of Residents' Associations, the dissemination of cultural events, many periodic publications referring to each neighbourhood, as well as the participation and construction of housing and social equipment projects.

Simultaneously, Residents' Associations grew en masse in the city and teaching evolved further, with architects adapting their work methodology to teach populations how to “read” and understand Architecture (Bandeirinha, 2007). Now, the school, architects, Architecture teachers, Architecture students, and residents had to engage in dialogue, as it was imperative to convey knowledge clearly, ensuring that everyone understood the function of space.

Proximity between Radical and Utopia: The Role of Architectural Education

Generally speaking, all ideas that look to the future are utopian. They are nowhere yet carried out, and that is why they are more attractive the less achievable they are. And naturally, what you must do is to be at the same time a calm person, objective in relation to the reality that exists. You can see where you are in history, and only do at that moment what the rest can respond to, however, always try to take a step forward. Always looking for the conditions for such a thing to happen.

Silva (1990, 02:24)

There is no utopia without Architecture (Coleman, 2005); however, it remains dormant in the teaching of the discipline, occupying a strange absence in the curriculum of those who propose any essay on the relevance of utopian pedagogies in the teaching of Architecture and in its professional practice (Coleman, 2012). Used as a methodology and as a tool for societal transformation, it considers social, cultural, economic, political, and public health factors, existing as an instigator of real possibilities while bringing with it a social criticism, a functional will, and the desire for a better future (Vieira, 2016).

Utopia thus becomes an intrinsic part of the creative process, both in the academic context and in professional practice. Utopias truly exist, both in the imagination and in the future, and should be seen as part of the current reality rather than outside of it.⁹ According to Vieira (2016), we know today that contemporary utopianism is realistic, experimental and participatory, and it can be taught through four modes of thinking: prospective, which encourages imagination and action, where the future is an object of desire that gives meaning to the present; critical, where hypotheses undergo validation processes requiring analysis of their impartiality, substance, data accuracy, and relevance, before the results can be considered true; holistic, with an awareness based on the systemic functioning of societies where hypotheses are tested; and creative, which fosters thinking of alternatives, testing multiple hypotheses, and thus escaping the replication of knowledge.

Alarmingly, universities are becoming hyperspecialized and students build their own curriculum through a menu of possibilities (Colomina, 2014), even though the problems we face today are systemic and require multidisciplinary responses, not just an alliance of disciplines (Vieira, 2020). We want our students to be innovative and to transform the future of the architect's profession, yet we continue to offer ingredients that aim at goals serving only the market, without providing the freedom to imagine alternative possibilities.

Nevertheless, we cannot guarantee that the exercise of radical pedagogies will be the answer to this issue, nor that it will lead to the practice of radical Architecture. However, these experiences represent the last real innovation in pedagogical approaches to teaching Architecture, with a bottom-up system that began with student protests when teachers were absent from schools and students refused to graduate in favour of their (op)position against the institution.

The teaching of Architecture needs to be reinvented, and perhaps together, we can co-create a new pedagogy suited to its time and (non) place. We must return to "questioning, experimenting, provoking, even if this implies the politically incorrect"¹⁰, and a radical attitude that leads to a critique of the future and fights for the common well-being is urgently needed. A new society will only emerge through a new discourse and a new pedagogy, where creativity and innovation will be essential for this rebirth (Pirondi, 2017; Vieira, 2020), not implying the invention of something entirely new but a recombination of elements (Vieira, 2020).

But Academia is in crisis (Pirondi, 2017). We now live in a moment of mistrust and disillusionment that robs us the dimensions of dream and hope, and utopia is the fundamental element needed to overcome this (Bandeira & Faria, 2014).

In Portugal, the education of Architecture is outdated (Beirão, 2017); both institutions and the profession – with a retrograde mentality, based on models and processes that do not address current challenges (Correia, 2018) – are in crisis (Baía & Labastida, 2014), and the reflection on its repositioning underscores the urgency of a paradigm shift. However, the unexpected (re)emergence of countercultural practices, critical of the limitations of current Architectural education in Portugal, raises the question of whether it is fulfilling its mission (Correia, 2018).

Architects are no longer merely visualizing physical space; they are now required to produce new narratives about new ways of operating within new social landscapes (Cutieru, 2020). We want to reborn, and we aspire to a new vision of the world. The time has come for architects to rediscover their most valuable and unique quality – the ability to imagine a new world (Stead et al., 2020), (re)formulating questions, provoking actions or reactions, and sculpting new panoramas of Architecture (Fagundes, 2016).

Proximity between the Portuguese and Utopia: The Role of Utopians (Final Considerations)

Portuguese will be what it has to be! You don't even have to ask if you can. (...) It's a matter of inventing the future. If you want: dream of the future, as they say. But I like to talk more like Frei Luís de Sousa says about Bartolomeu de Mártires: missing the future. Instead of missing the past – which only serves to make fado and other similar things that don't interest me at all – it's necessary to start missing the future and see what future you must miss.

Silva (1988, p.158)

The Carnation Revolution found students in the streets and an empty school¹¹ (Bandeira & Faria, 2014). These radical pedagogical experiences took place in Portugal through a participatory process that brought utopia to life when students, teachers, and architects abandoned schools, as the time and opportunity had come to materialize policies, processes, projects, and dreams. SAAL, with all its pedagogical legacy, makes it clear that active participation is necessary for schools to have an innovative and revolutionary impact on the city and society.

“Utopia is there in the horizon”¹², it makes us move, and the modern urge to design an ever-better world continues, with no end point but with a process as our starting point. Utopia must be the engine of these processes and developments, requiring a discussion based on utopian ways of thinking and in a university where knowledge is, above all, an instrument of utopian freedom and a critical thinking. The present and future of our societies depend on Architecture as an instrument for utopia, and we need to train students to be capable of manoeuvring it.

Thus, the current challenge for our Architecture schools is to adopt a clear position, offering radical pedagogies and pedagogues capable of providing our students with the opportunity and the freedom to think and to act critically.

Here, we do not evoke *retrotopia* as nostalgia for the past, even though it is “the Portuguese utopia par excellence” (Vasconcelos et al., 2021, p.22). Instead, we reference the SAAL case, as it oscillates between a realist utopia and a radical pedagogy¹³, like two oxymorons that come together, understand, and complement each other. These realistic utopias, or radical experiments, are idealistic in the dream (radical), but pragmatic in the action (in experimentation), which is exactly what contemporary utopians need: “experience the future in the present” (Vieira, 2021, p.46).

Re-imagining education is not a defeat; it is, instead, a victory. We must encourage and invest in improbable ways of thinking, or we risk creating “illiterates” who will not be able to learn, unlearn, and relearn again¹⁴. In short, this experience, which we remember and relive today, has its origins in much more than an ideal dream. It emerges through a concrete objective, a dream with an expiration date, which aimed to bring people closer to the discussion and to Architecture, fostering proximity between processes, architects, schools, students, the city, and the world. Architecture is, and always will be, of the people and for people. Portuguese Architecture is all of us, it’s you and me. Close, together.

Notes

- 1 Alluding to the iconic quotes that marked May 1968, such as “soyez réalistes, demandez l’impossible” and “l’imagination aux pouvoirs”.
- 2 In May 1968, while the schools of Fine Arts in Porto convened, the lack of dialogue between students and teachers became evident. This absence of communication provoked a strong reaction from Architecture students, leading to the publication of the second issue of *Boletim ESBAP*. In this publication, they called for a meaningful dialogue between society and Architecture, and advocated for the democratization of education (Moniz, 2010).
- 3 Vittorio Gregotti, guest speaker at the II Study Meeting (Moniz, 2010, p.71).
- 4 “Before the Right to the City, there was the Right to the Place” (Costa, 2009).
- 5 This intervention originated from a decree issued by the Secretary of State for Housing and Urbanism, Nuno Portas. It stands as an emblematic, albeit brief, and unique convergence in the social and cultural history of Portugal, bringing together the community, architects, schools, students, and politicians.
- 6 “(...) everything you can think about dialogue and participation will perhaps have a very utopian aspect, very ‘ideal’” (Siza, Milheiro & Dias, 2009, p.19).
- 7 Nuno Portas was responsible for the Division of Construction and Housing in 1962 and formed the Group of Coordination and Studies of Housing, a multidisciplinary team that included architects, engineers, economists, and sociologists (Portas, 2015).
- 8 “All courses carried out investigations in poor neighborhoods, or degraded housing. (...) With the 25th of April, it started to act directly, and the school turned to the outside world and interacted with the population” (Fernandez, 2014, 26:20).
- 9 Thesis defended by Ernst Bloch in the 1940s (Vieira, 2020).
- 10 Answer by Mário Ramos, a student at the time, about his ambitions regarding his schoolwork (Bandeira & Faria, 2014, p.179).
- 11 This experience ends on October 27, 1976, without any operation being fully completed during its active period. However, it left behind a significant legacy, with 169 operations still in progress, involving 41,665 families, 2,259 homes under construction, and 5,741 homes yet to be started (Bandeirinha, 2007).

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- 12 Fernando Birri, quoted by Eduardo Galeano in *Las Palabras Andantes* by Eduardo Galeano, published by Siglo XXI, 1993 (Galeano & Borges, 1993).

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If radical means going back to roots, origins, and changing the system, and Pedagogies imply a system, then Radical Pedagogies is an Oxymoron. Maybe it means “transition phase”, because they don’t last forever, even because the system is institutionalized and is no longer radical.

(Colomina, 2014, 42:25)

- 14 Edgar Morin, quoted by Fátima Vieira (2020).

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