





¡TENEMOS UNA SALA
PARA TRABAJAR

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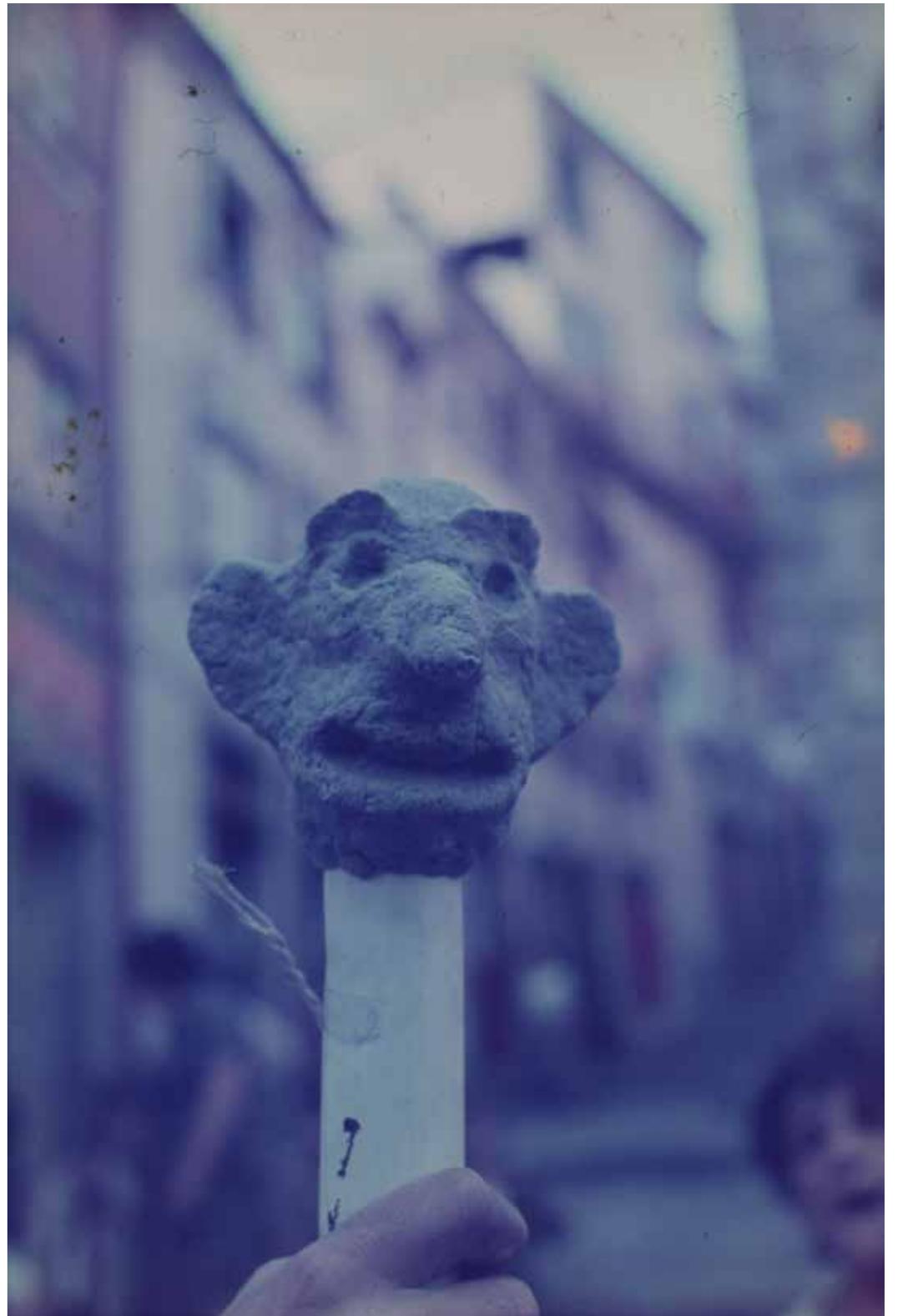
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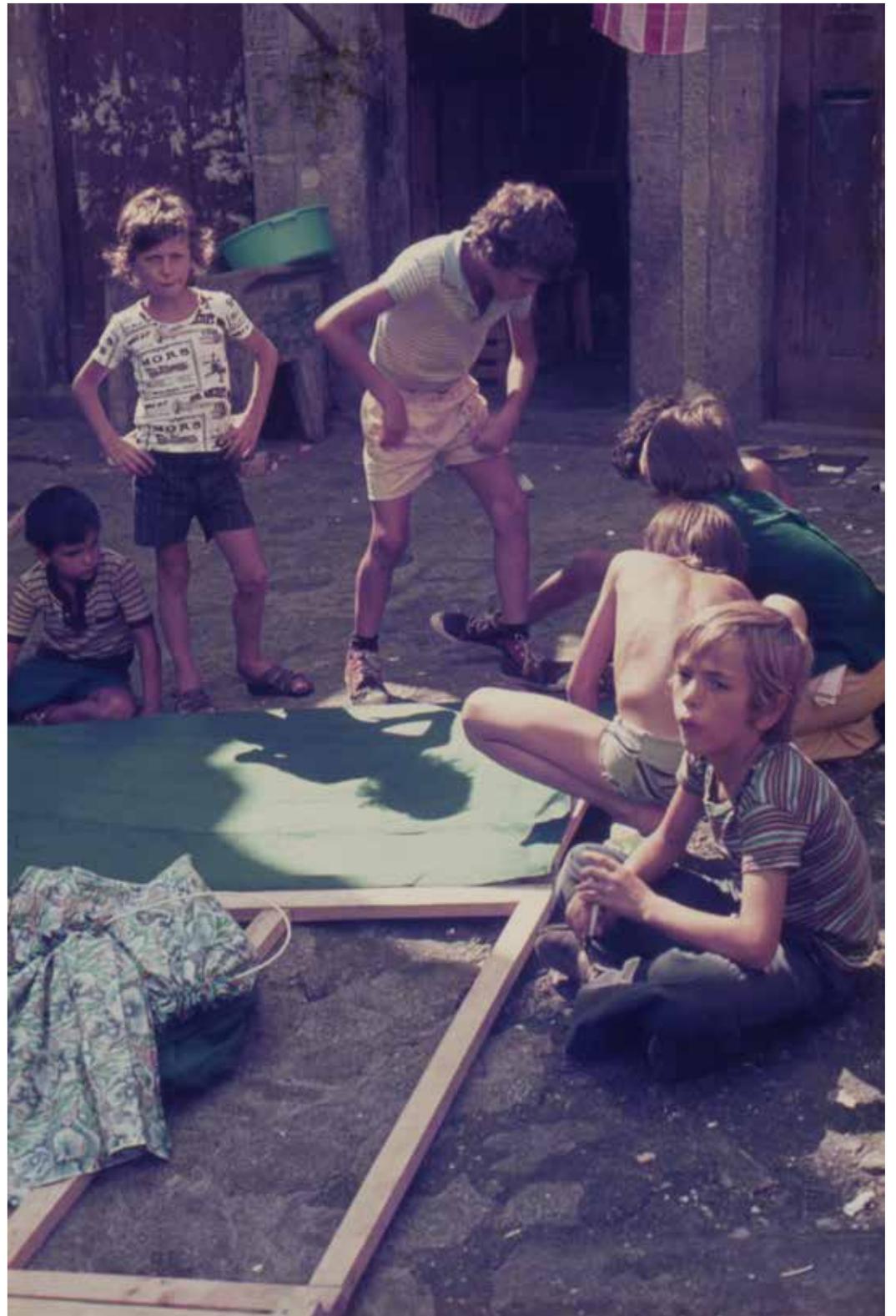










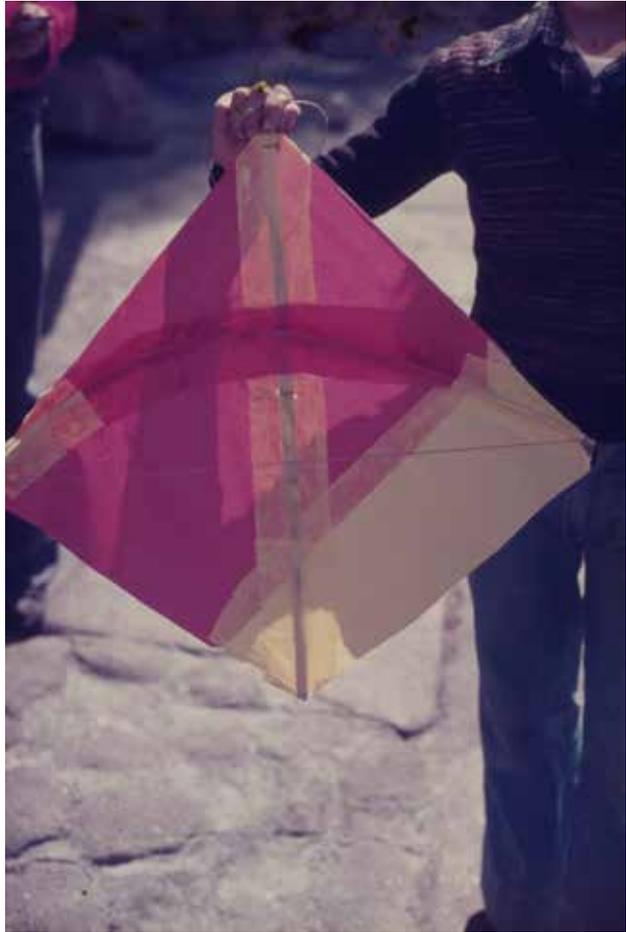




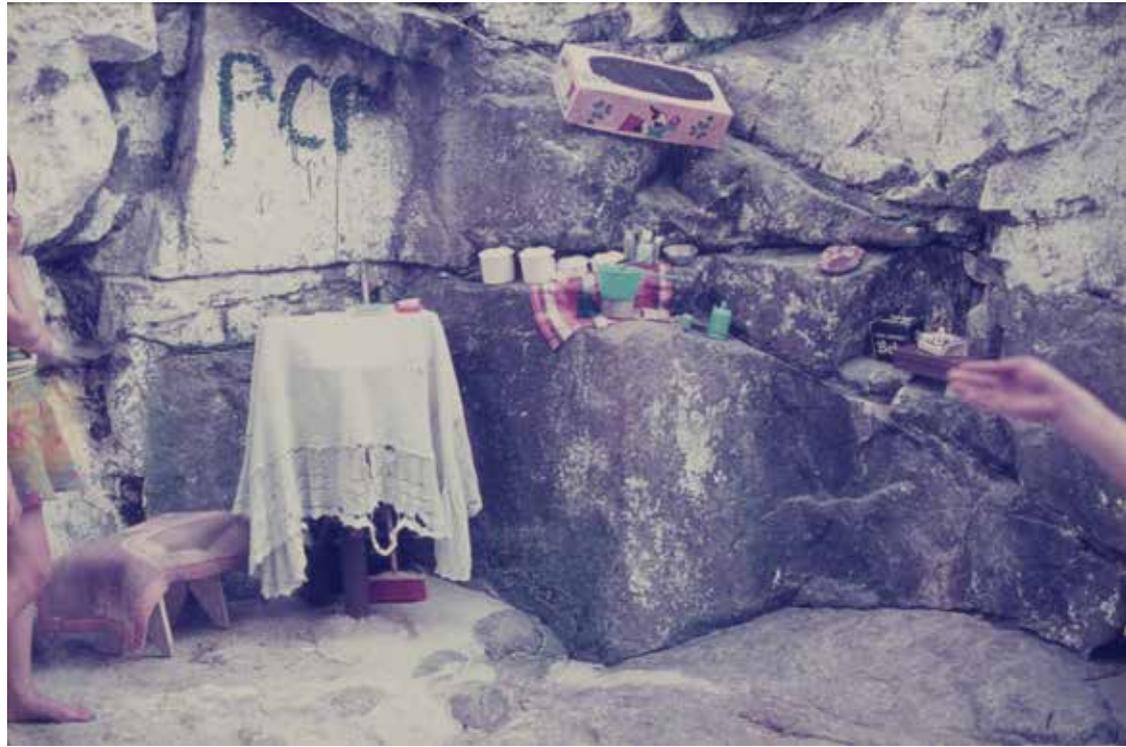
























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- Young man, who built this car?
- Me and my friends! We got some bearings from the junkyard and some wooden boards...
- Who taught you how to do that?
- No one!
- Where do you usually race?
- Here, all the way down the street, but it is very noisy so we also race underneath the bridge...
- I can't believe that!
- It's the truth. And you know what?
Its awesome!
- But that's dangerous. Did anyone hurt themselves?
- Nope.
- Would you like to participate in a soap box car race?

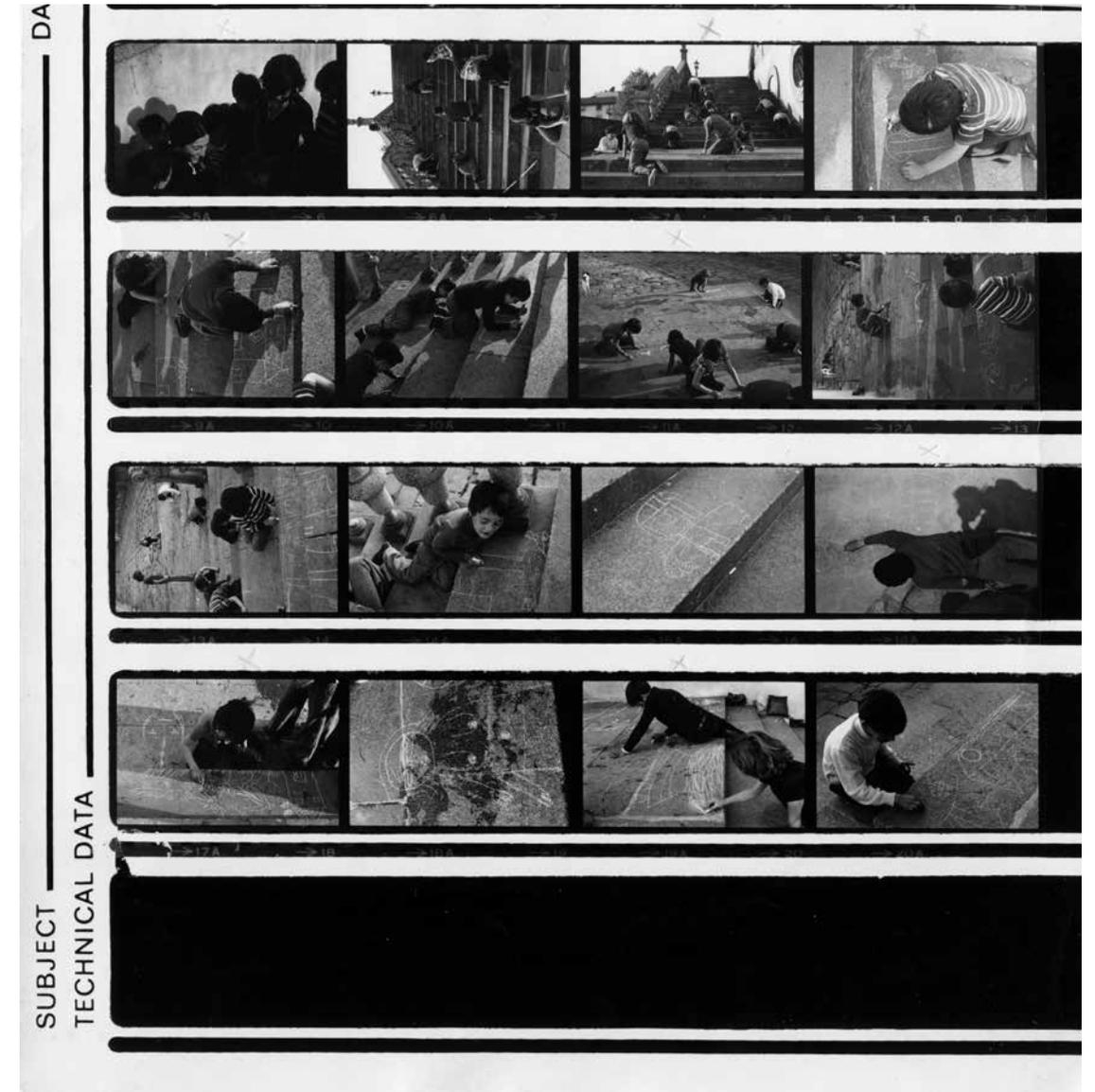
HOW CHILDREN PLAY

The neighborhood children spent their time playing games of war, climbing walls, playing cards, soccer, hopscotch, playing house, jumping in puddles...



CHALK DRAWINGS ON THE PAVEMENT

White chalk was the first working material. Chalk on granite pavement. Chalk drawings were everywhere, occupying the square, invading the streets, on the stairs... It was beautiful!



ONE CAN ALSO PAINT

Paintings soon materialized without hesitations. Paint covered the sheets of paper and no one asked, "What should I paint?" Emotions were expressed in the shape of rivers, bridges, castles, rains, suns. Painting was a luxury!



INSTALLATIONS

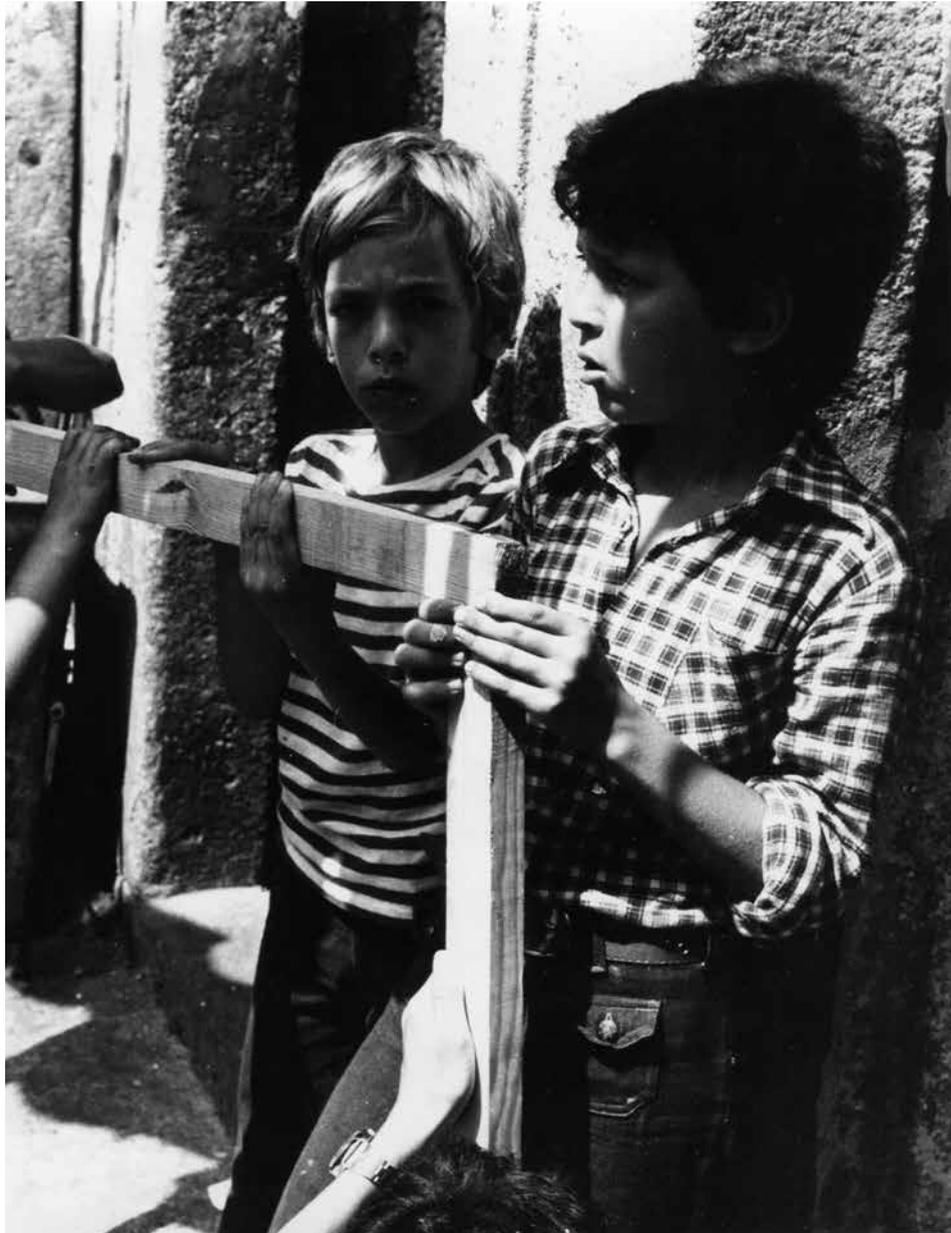
With materials brought from home and other found ones (including toys, pieces of cloth, pebbles, bottle caps, odd things found in the trash) representations of reality as well as deep wishes were revealed in a corner, a wall, a step.



PUPPET THEATRE

Stories were always locally specific.

They chose "Little Red Riding Hood" referring to the *machismo* of some men of the neighborhood, "The Noises of Pena Ventosa" portraying frequent and loud private and public altercations, and "The Codfish Queue" referring to the scarcity of food and subsequent quarrels involving women who would cut the line.



SOAPBOX CAR RACE

Groups of children built soapbox cars: small, large, with and without a roof, upholstered, with backs and arm rests, decorated or quite simple. One could see boys sawing, hammering, painting, working with joy to represent their neighborhood. Kites were built with poles and paper to be flown in the closing party and also instruments to accompany the band Pop Latas.



PEDAGOGY OF THE STREETS, AN EXHIBITION

Lúcia Almeida Matos

This exhibition revisits the experimental artistic project conceived and realized by Elvira Leite together with the community of Largo de Pena Ventosa, in Bairro da Sé, one of Porto's historic neighborhoods. The project unfolded from 1976 to 1977, after the local housing support program (SAAL), launched right after the Portuguese political revolution in 1974, was unexpectedly shut down. As Elvira Leite's project developed, the streets became an active meeting point to discuss ideas, plan activities, and learn new skills. Largo da Pena Ventosa was turned into a workshop where children of all ages interacted to give life to a plan that reflected their personal interests.

Elvira Leite's initiative was motivated by a sense of frustration, impotence and outrage experienced by the local community when confronted with the unfulfilled promise of better housing conditions. Although the project dates back to the beginning of Leite's professional career, it is already characterized by what would later become her theory and practice, in one word, her

pedagogy. This was nurtured by her sensitivity and intelligence, and firmly rooted in research and education resulting in the development of her own teaching methodology. It is a minimally prescriptive pedagogy which welcomes the unpredictable and aims at realizing both individual and collective projects.

The exhibition opens with Elvira Leite's words and images, which record and depict various stages of the project while also illustrating teaching methodologies she would continue over the years: question, dialogue, proposal, and implementation; the use of simple means to achieve maximum expression. Next come her remarkable pictures and slides, which reveal the children's total involvement in each and every activity as well as the depth of the photographer's insight. These images reveal Leite's thinking; we can see how she captures each detail and selects each angle. She was concerned with values such as access and democracy and sought to promote critical thinking as a way to bring about change. If we observe these images in light of the project, we can understand that they

do not show children aimlessly playing in the trash but rather children who are actively looking for something (and yes, in the trash!) that they can use to create their “installation”. When we consider this set of images and their sequence, we become fully aware of both the reason for the activities they portray and the reason for capturing these activities through photographs. Seemingly, they are just records of children at play but in reality they document actions which are collectively deemed necessary for the pursuit of specific goals.

The radical nature of this project is rooted in Elvira Leite’s refusal to let the precarious socio-economic conditions of the neighborhood determine or condition her objectives. This refusal is revolutionary insofar as it is rooted in the notion that those who would be traditionally regarded as the target population of the project are in fact its co-authors. It is their experiences that will give shape and substance to the community’s decisions, the first of which is the choice of the project site. The Pena Ventosa square, already a playground for local children, becomes a *magic circle* in Elvira Leite’s images. And in this *magic circle*, “the feeling of being ‘separate together’ in an exceptional situation, the feeling of sharing something remarkable”¹ happened every week. Whilst the square is the place where activities unfold, these activities are modeled after the games children organize in it, thus becoming a confluence of “authentic expression” with “imitation of the adult world”².

Like a number of philosophers such as Nietzsche, Agamben, and Walter Benjamin, Elvira Leite respects children’s free playing and game playing for their disruptive dimension while also being a “general rehearsal for

life”³. Over the course of the project, Leite realized that free play and game playing unveils children’s unsuspected knowledge and their surprising critical stance towards the adult world. Moving from the observation of children’s activities, Leite designed the proposals that she then debated with her very young partners, helping them shape and voice their desires and critical opinions and thus create their own project.

To better understand Elvira Leite’s pedagogical approach, it is useful to distinguish free play and game play. Both are integral parts of her method. Play can be defined as an open activity without a specific objective, driven by imagination and dominated by chance. Despite sharing some of these characteristics, a game always has a purpose, albeit “useless”. If we replace the expression “game play” with the word “project”, we realize that the latter shares essential features with the former: it is an activity with a specific goal, which can be attained by following a set of rules.

Nevertheless, that which distinguishes game play from project also defines what is essential in a project, as viewed by Elvira Leite. The project goal is not pre-defined, but rather co-created by the “players” in interaction, and most of the “rules” arise in the process of acquiring the skills needed to achieve the desired goal. In other words, rules are not pre-established, let alone arbitrary, but are identified by the project co-creators as useful and necessary. For this reason, they are accepted rather than imposed. But Elvira Leite is also committed to keeping free play going while pursuing an objective. Chance, surprise and unplanned situations are accepted as forces that redefine the path without compromising its end point.

Besides her daily teaching activities at school and the projects she developed in less formal environments, Elvira Leite is the author, together with other educators, writers, and artists, of an important body of literature marked by the same articulation of theory and practice, the same power of observation and attentive listening. She also produced simple toys to be used in schools or at home to stimulate the imagination and the senses. Several generations of students bear witness to the impact that Elvira Leite’s diversified pedagogical method had on both their personal lives and professional development. Her approach continues to inspire methodologies and programs in schools, museums and other cultural institutions. Beyond a more formal pedagogical discourse, the images of the Pena Ventosa project reveal the founding attitude of this pedagogy, as expressed through Elvira Leite’s words: “chaos, irreverence, utopia, all make sense”, or, to put it another way, “one can also paint on the streets”⁴.

1 Huizinga, Johan (1980), *Homo Ludens: a study of the play element in culture*. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, p.12.

2 Larsen, Lars Bang (2014), “Círculos dibujados en el agua: el juego en tonalidad mayor”. *Playgrounds — reinventar la plaza*, Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, p.17.

3 Borja-Villel, Manuel, ed al. (2014), “Prefacio”. *Playgrounds — reinventar la plaza*, Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, p.11.

4 Leite, Elvira; Malpique, Manuela (1986), *Espaços de Criatividade*. Porto, Edições Afrontamento, p.89.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH ELVIRA LEITE, MAY 2016



SOFIA VICTORINO Can you recall how your idea of developing a project in the Sé neighborhood in Porto came about? Why did you choose this place in particular?

ELVIRA LEITE I knew Largo da Pena Ventosa since my childhood. I remember the walks with my father through the centre of Porto, where I was born. We used to talk about the history of the city and stopped at Sé neighborhood. We entered via Rua da Bainharia, and went down to Igreja dos Grilos. Other times we stopped near the river where he would open a folder with drawing materials. Then, back home, we worked on these sketches. During the walks he would explain the political events of the time. He wanted me to be aware of the lack of freedom of expression, of sociocultural inequalities and the urgent need to change the political regime that sustained them. (...)

My father died in 1973 and did not witness the revolution in April 1974 after which I became politically active. A vital energy filled the streets and there was a desire to intervene and work in the public space where ideas were discussed. I participated in debates and had activist friends who shared with me different perspectives and ways of fighting. I participated but I was not seduced by political party militancy. I was more interested in grassroots activities, and in projects that would intervene locally. I wanted to work with education and culture, in the sense of a critical and active pedagogy that would lead to a better public

education; in changing curricula and learning methods, in participating in the reorganization of education in general. My political activism was dedicated to the struggle for a good education for all: an open education, welcoming, attentive to differences, creative, democratic, organized around projects facilitating interdisciplinary work. The priority then was to solve the problems at hand. This was the time both to dream and to live realities and situations of urgency, and so I left my solitary practice of painting behind and instead became actively dedicated to a practice focused on the social and the collective.

SV This project takes place in the years following the 1974 revolution and carries the spirit of democratic participation in an effort to construct something in collaboration with the residents. What motivated you at the time?

EL The SAAL initiative (Local Ambulatory Support Service) emerged in 1975 as a response to the pressing need for renovation of urban neighborhoods. Quick responses to immediate needs were necessary. Excellent architects designed new housing projects with democratic participation of the residents, but after one or two years, the SAAL withdrew indefinitely, generating enormous disillusion and revolt. I attended the popular assemblies, meetings of leftist parties, and the Sé residents' association as well. I remember that there was a lot of talk about the need for a kindergarten, one



that would welcome the children who were vulnerable, roaming around in the neighborhood. It was a problem that required an immediate response. I accepted the task and began working on solutions, but did not achieve the desired results. Promises were made to support the endeavor, but it was not certain when the help would arrive. (...) The time had come to activate my project of developing artistic activities and nurture community engagement.

SV In your text “Na rua também se pinta” [“One can also paint on the streets”] from 1986, you talk about how the children remained on the streets because of the precarious and degraded housing. At the time you conducted a survey on living conditions in the neighborhood. What were the conclusions of your research? What realities did you encounter?

EL Before making the proposal I conducted a survey of the parents’ lifestyles and of the games that kids would play on the streets.

I took photographs and offered them to the people portrayed which helped to build trust. I observed the women chatting while keeping an eye on their small, restless children. The children kept busy using the street as playground. They enacted funerals, wars, rehearsed attacks on kids from

other boroughs, climbed the highest walls, played cards, hopscotch or jumping rope, imitated the adults ruffles, rummaged through dumpsters, or played ball. When they got to know me better, some of them wanted to show me their homes. I found some livable interiors and many others without basic conditions of habitability. The refurbishment of people’s dwellings was eagerly awaited. When I asked the children about their interests and dreams, they said they did not have any, only nightmares. They questioned me without embarrassment and freely answered my questions. I felt welcome and made friends.

SV How did you present your project to them and how did you plan the working process?

EL I told them about “my” — our — possible project. After initial doubts, they began to be more enthusiastic about developing a project involving artistic practice. At home I made a sketch to present the ideas to the children. I returned to the Largo and gathered as many children as possible. I introduced the project. Nothing was definite, everything was open to discussion within the context of the local culture, reality, preferences, possibilities and desires. The main problem was the lack of an adequate space. I had prepared some answers. Why not using the streets, the granite steps, the square, the water fountain? The whole set looked like a huge studio. It was an unorthodox space, but the street was already used in so many situations... it was where they cooked, washed their clothes, danced at neighborhood parties, engaged in long conversations, it was a multipurpose space. After all, they were used to make the most of the little that they had and to deal with uncertainty! With wide eyes and open smiles they accepted the idea with confidence.



I found donors that provided all materials. I would park the car nearby, and the children would carry what was needed for each session. In the evening, their mothers kept the materials and the work produced in their homes. Our meetings were on Wednesdays and Saturdays, provided it did not rain. The whole process lasted for about two years. All children were welcome. Sometimes there were 6 or 10, and at other occasions more than 20 turned up. Ages varied, between 4 to 13 years old. In the meantime, kids from other parts of the Sé borough also joined us. The group insisted on activities such as painting, building kites and a soapbox car race. I accepted their wishes and proposed to add two more activities: drawing and theatre (they all cried puppet theatre, music and singing). As for the details, we would work them out along the way and would accept some unexpected changes to the plan. Then the work started.

SV The activities involved several stages and different forms of expression. Can you recall them?

EL We started with drawing: drawing directly onto the pavement of Largo de Pena Ventosa. No theme was imposed and the material was just white chalk. No one asked what to draw. Everyone knew. There were several sessions since the space was large and it was not a rainy season. We were all amazed by the final results.

The next step was the much desired painting on paper. I taught how to make water paints, which were kept in large bottles inside the houses. Again, no themes were imposed. I only helped those who asked for help with some advice on the technique. The older kids made signs for the demonstrations that were happening; others painted landscapes, houses and more houses, rooms, walls, skies, strange things, it was a true explosion of creativity. The paintings dried on the stairs leading to the entrance of the Igreja

dos Grilos. The most significant communication was with themselves by drawing and by painting. This activity was repeated throughout the project whenever they wanted. They were autonomous.

In preparation for the puppet theatre shows there were sessions of “political” debate. It was necessary for the plays to focus on something that would make us think. These moments revealed the extent to which the children were informed. How much they knew and wanted to know. What to decide regarding the stories? Should one invent them? Maybe it wasn’t necessary. “It is possible to draw on ideas that everyone understands from real life...”, said João, for example. Ideas, conversations and stories were told, written and recorded. Three pieces were chosen: “Little Red Riding Hood from Sé” referring to the *machismo* of some men of the neighborhood, “The noises of Pena Ventosa” portraying the frequent and loud altercations, and “The codfish queue” about the scarcity of food and quarrels involving women who would cut the line. The puppets were made with detail and expression: heads, bodies, costumes. We also needed music so I brought my guitar and taught some of the older kids to play simple melodies. Some of children brought cans, metal and plastic bowls, wooden and metal sticks to produce accompanying rhythms. The adults helped build the wooden structure for the puppet theatre. Materials were donated by local shops keepers. The performances were hilarious and so were the songs. The words were very critical, and the adults learned from what they heard and saw. There were no empty seats at the two shows.

The soapbox car race was unforgettable. The children organized themselves and took over. I just encouraged them to creatively customize their cars.

Everyone in all the city districts knew about the forthcoming race and other kids also prepared to participate. They formed a jury, decided on the rules, and spread the word. Everyone built his or her car according to taste and creativity. Bearings for the cars wheels sold out in the city’s stores. I collected prizes for the winners, from several companies which donated books, school materials, games, clothes. The band “Pop Latas”, usually present in popular events and parties, also came. It was a big show in town.

The last part of the project was equally pleasurable. We built paper kites with the help of Mr. Magalhães, who drank less on Wednesdays and Saturdays to help us with the construction as we listened to his stories. The kites were then thrown into the wind, flying and carrying wishes written on pieces of paper tightly attached to their tails. It was a poetic action announcing the end of our project.

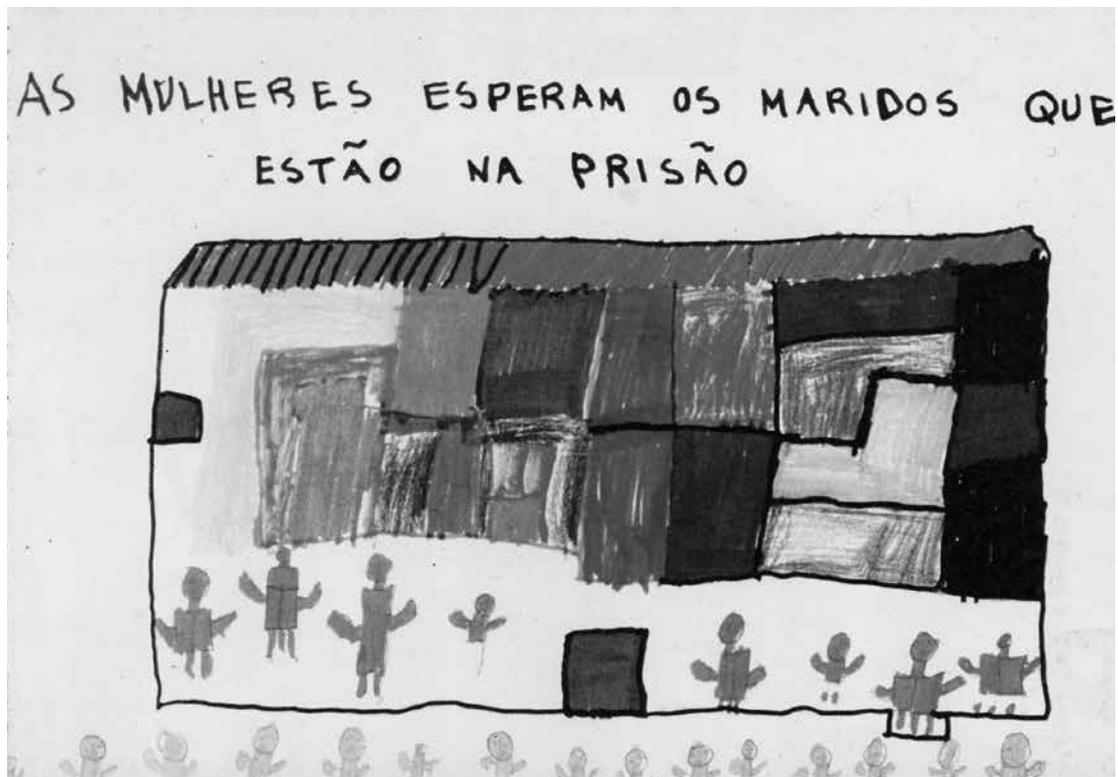
Images

Elvira Leite, Avenida dos Aliados, Porto, 1976–77.

Elvira Leite, Bairro da Sé, Porto, 1976–77.

Elvira Leite, House interior at Bairro da Sé, Porto, 1976–77.

Elvira Leite, Bairro da Sé, Porto, 1976–77.



FREEDOM IN OUR HANDS IN FREEDOM

Susana Lourenço Marques

The military coup of 25 April 1974, which brought an end to over forty years of dictatorship in Portugal, led to a profound transformation in the political and economic structure of Portuguese society. It also triggered new forms of participatory democracy encouraging groups of citizens to organize and combat the devastating poverty, the high rate of illiteracy and the lack of even minimal living conditions.

Photography helped to register this desire for change and proved to be an essential instrument to celebrate the revolution in progress. It afforded historical visibility to the revolution by documenting the intervention of the armed forces, the release of political prisoners or the subsequent struggles between political parties. It offered us a reading of the individual stories that made the revolution, in images of the many demonstrations, as well as of the graphic inscriptions that began to fill and illuminate the streets, all around the country. The publications *Portugal Livre* (1974), *Da Resistência à Libertação* (1977), *As Paredes na Revolução* (1978)¹, or, in the international context, *Portugal 1974—1975: Regards sur une tentative de pouvoir populaire* (1979), all include examples of powerful images about

the Portuguese revolutionary period, confirming the continuing persistence of a space of counter-culture and a freedom of expression that was then fully asserting itself.

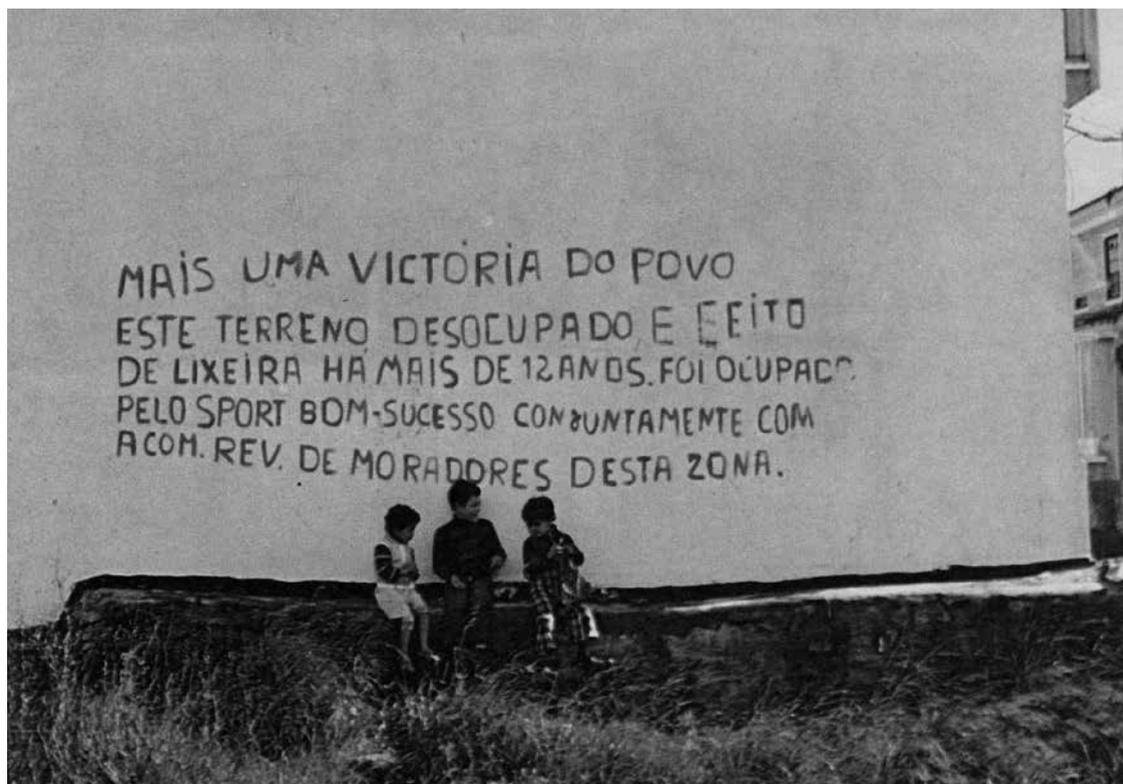
The photographs taken by Elvira Leite in Porto, in Rua de Pena Ventosa between 1976 and 1977, captured this contagious popular force, boldly addressing the social and economic precariousness of the *Bairro da Sé*, the neighbourhood just below the cathedral. Her project helped, even if only fleetingly, to create the feeling that change was possible. Reacting to the sense of disillusion that had become rooted in one of the city's poorest neighbourhoods — without access to programmes for the improvement of their homes and the development of community spaces — Leite invited children to take part in an activity of discovery, in which they would work together and basically teach themselves. In what was one of the first pedagogical projects that she undertook with disadvantaged populations, Leite's method placed an emphasis on dialogue, discovering freedom of choice through drawing, painting and theatre — where life itself was at stake — stressing imagination and the breaking of conventions as a valid artistic stance.



It was, therefore, not a question of finding an existing playground in order to show the ceremonial ritual of innocence taking place there, but instead of fostering and incorporating the imaginary universe of these children, using photography as a means of registering that collective experimentation. Understanding the child as a *genius loci* of the street, she began by recording the way in which they played as a form of easing her way into the community of Pena Ventosa and only afterwards did she photographically document the activities that she developed with them, in particular their ways of drawing and painting, the *installations* that they made from objects that they found, their improvised stories about the neighbourhood's life transfigured into puppet shows, as well as their planning of more traditional games, such as the flying of paper kites or the races that they organised with their home-made carts.

of view of the same scene, rapidly repositioning herself in order to accompany their movement, she created variations of scale that confirm her proximity and her way of being among them while making her images.

The utopian vision that guided her pedagogical mission was based on the relationship of trust that she was able to develop, leading her to make images about the making of images breaking down drawings with the very act of representation — house, animals, boats, but also posters for demonstrations — discreetly demonstrating the desire for change with which her activities were filled. Over the course of a year, her innovative project showed itself to be an exceptional instrument for connecting the home with the street, understanding play as an extension of the process of representation and asserting the social and political role of education through art.



The drawings-games, understood as both pedagogics and culture, gradually appropriated and enlivened the street, becoming part of the language and of a learning that was being done from their own place, based on the discovery of their identity and the knowledge and enhancement of their stories. If, as Giorgio Agamben states, *the immediate result of [the] invasion of life by play is a change and acceleration of time*², then, in these photographs, we can better understand the artistic qualities and contingencies of this movement and this time and the way in which this circumstance of creativity acquires its most expressive crystallisation.

Involuntarily associating herself with the Portuguese “forgotten generation” of the 1950s (Costa Martins, Victor Palla, Gérard Castello-Lopes or Carlos Afonso Dias) which had regrouped once more in Portugal in the 1980s, her photographs follow the *duplicating* gestures of humanist conviction, which render the formal composition secondary to a poetic realism and are, as Claude Nori writes, *a way of being simultaneously within and before reality*. They are, above all, a record of the vitality and creativity of the street as a space of intervention and pedagogy, and a *way of seeing* this voluntary participation in which the children direct the creation and composition of their own images.

Elvira Leite moved among the children, who were apparently indifferent to the presence of the camera, showing us the fully absorbing condition of the inventive world of childhood. Attempting to capture multiple points

The way in which she photographs can, in part, be considered close to other images in which childhood and play assume a special leading role,



namely in the photographic essays of Arthur Leipzig, published in such magazines as *Life*, *Fortune* or *Look*, in which — by evoking the Renaissance imagery of Peter Bruegel’s *Children’s Game* — he photographs the streets of New York as a recreational space, an inscription and an extension of the house, looking at the graphic records as manifestations of the complexity and contradiction of childhood when lived in the street. There is no direct repercussion on the work of Elvira Leite, but analogies can be found both in the playful dimension that is manifested in places from which it seemed to have been kept away, and in the recognition of the drawing as the centre of this pedagogy. Another possible comparison can be made with the photographs that Nigel Henderson took in Bethnal Green (London), for the *urban reidentification grid* presented at CIAM 9

(Aix-en-Provence), in 1953, by the architects Alison and Peter Smithson. Giving value to children’s games and their appropriation of the urban space for a critical reappraisal of postwar urbanism and the proposal of modern architecture, Nigel Henderson framed children through *their capacity to be creatively involved with the built environment, like a subject that observes how space can be activated in everyday life, suggesting new forms of order and relationships between society and space.*³ In Portugal, specifically in Porto, the social housing projects arising from the short lived *Serviço Ambulatório de Apoio Local* (SAAL — Local Ambulatory Support Service) incorporated that idea of the social fabric in which the domestic and collective space was simultaneously rooted in the popular identity and in its opening up and development in a context of freedom and equity.

Finally, they remind us of the series that Helen Levitt published in her emblematic *A way of seeing* (1965) or later (1987) in *In the Street: Chalk Drawings and Messages, New York City, 1938—1948*, dedicated to *lyrical photographs*, in the words of James Agee. She photographed in Spanish Harlem and Lower East Side (New York) in the 1930s and 1940s and it was her participation as an educator and photographer in the Federal Art Project⁴ in 1937 that influenced her interest in gathering together chalk drawings and other messages recorded all over the city and in observing the way in which children appropriate the street as their playground. A major reference in capturing the «salvation and immortality of innocence»⁵, to Levitt, photographing children was a way of inscribing their art, following their intuition and understanding how they expressed their aspirations and desires. What was important in her work was, above all, «to capture the experience of childhood, of what it is like to be a child, when the real melts away so easily into the pretend or imaginary»⁶, simultaneously reflecting the discreet individuality of the person who was portraying them.

Remembering Levitt’s belief that «beauty is extracted from reality», what also seems to matter in the photographs taken by Elvira Leite is not a nostalgic vision of the past, but instead the discovery of their connections and transformations in the present and the manifest topicality that they still contain, when the street now seems to be less of a place of playful invention and political protest.

Seeing these photographs again is, after all, a way of reframing the critical pedagogy underlying them, not only in the revolutionary period that contextualises them or in the recovery of the private memory of the residents

of Pena Ventosa (restoring for them the visibility of actions that they thought had been lost), but, above all, because the minimal utopia which that generation demanded — “we want a room to work in, we want a room where we can study”, as can be read in one of the photographs — is now ironically recovered in another form of protest: the right to housing, which can now be seen as having been replaced by the mass occupation of the tourist industry that seems to have taken over the city.

This cyclical movement, which can be observed more easily by comparing the images, also of childhood, shows us, after all, as Mark Twain wrote, that *history doesn’t repeat itself, but it often rhymes* and that its power has nothing to do with “this was”, but with the emergence of the rupture and the gesture of change that each image can carry with it.

Images from the books *O 25 de Abril visto pelas crianças* (Mil Dias, 1978) and *As Paredes na Revolução* (Mil Dias, 1978).

The title *Freedom in our hands in freedom* quotes the text of Sérgio Guimarães published in *As paredes da revolução* (Mil Dias, 1978).

1 Yet another example is the book *O 25 de Abril visto pelas crianças* (Mil Dias, 1978), in an edition compiled by Sérgio Guimarães, composed of drawings made by children, collected from several schools around the country and donated by the Support Fund for Youth Organisations and the *União dos Clubes de Campolide*.

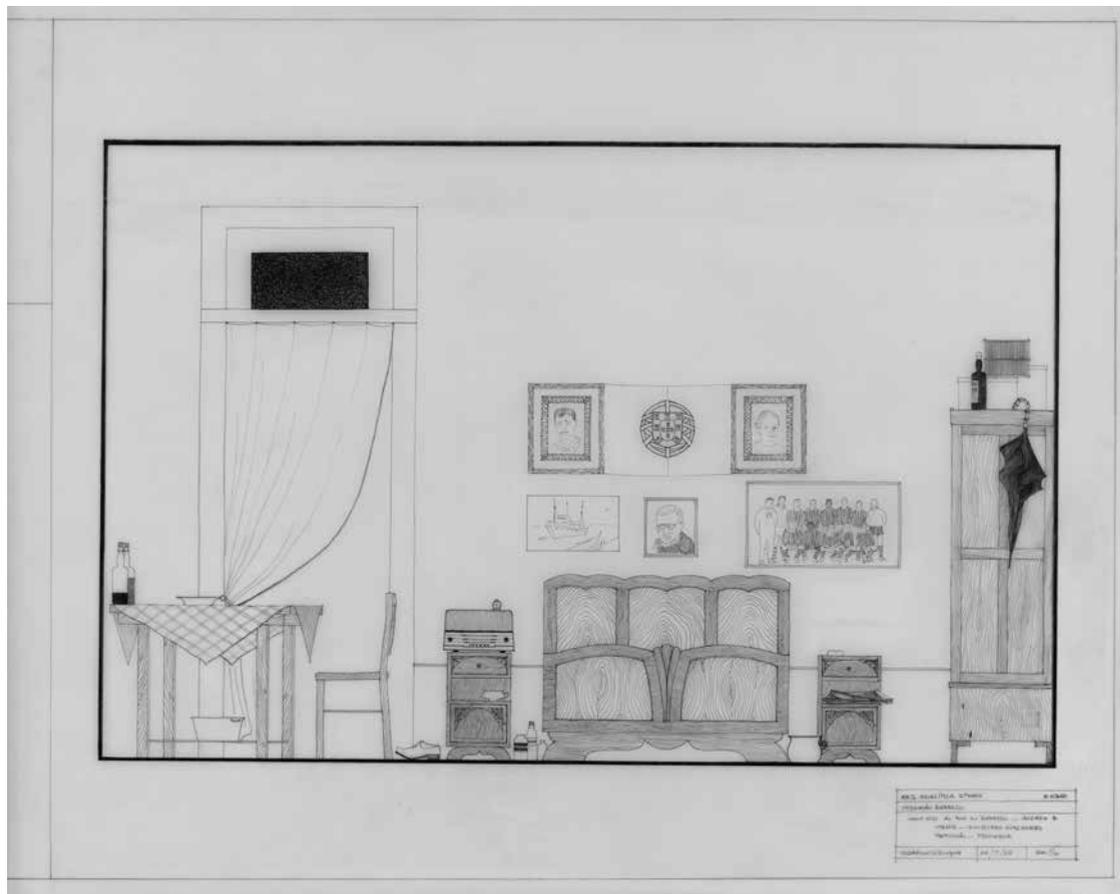
2 Agamben, Giorgio (2002), *Enfance et Histoire*. Paris, Petit bibliotheque Payot.

3 Kozlovsky, Roy (2004), «The child grilled at CIAM: children as representations and as subjects in postwar architectural discourse», *In si(s)tu*, n.º 7/8. Porto, Associação Cultural Insisto.

4 The Federal Art Project (1935–1943) was a New Deal programme designed to fund the visual arts in the United States.

5 Levitt, Helen (1965), *A way of seeing: photographs of New York by Helen Levitt with an essay by James Agee*. New York, The Viking Press.

6 Levitt, Helen; Dyer, Geoff (2017), *One, Two, Three, More*. New York, powerHouse Books.



at that time: *Inquérito à Arquitetura Popular em Portugal* (Survey on Popular Architecture in Portugal, 1961); *Serviço Ambulatório de Apoio Local* (SAAL — Local Ambulatory Support Service 1974—1976); and *Organização Insurrecional do Espaço* (Insurrectional Organisation of Space, 1975).

The *Survey on Popular Architecture in Portugal* began by showing how modern architects were drawing closer to popular architecture, searching for the functional meaning of its form in its roots, its programme and its context. Comparable in its aims to the exhibition *Architecture Without Architects* organised by Bernard Rudofsky at MOMA in 1964, the Survey in Portugal was sponsored by the State, with Salazar's dictatorial regime using the rural world to construct a nationalist identity reduced, through simplicity, to the idealisation of a "Portuguese house".

However, despite the regime's agenda, the "Survey on Popular Architecture in Portugal" could not help but reveal the precariousness of people's ways of life, the lack of basic conditions (the absence of electricity, water and sanitation) witnessed in the many houses that the modern architects visited. Some of these architects, who were teachers at the Porto School of Fine Arts, gave their students the task of surveying the poor neighbourhoods in the centre of Porto, to be drawn on a scale of 1:20, with remarkable detail. This enabled them to identify the constructive systems, the building materials that were used, the furniture, and even personal objects. This type of exercise (undertaken as part of the subject of "Analytical Architecture" taught by Lixa Filgueiras) once again revealed the precariousness and the overcrowding of the houses built of granite (just like the streets).



This proximity between the students of the Fine Arts School and the populations of the poorer neighbourhoods in the late 1960s and early 1970s built a certain degree of trust and frequently ties of affection that proved to be essential when the Revolution established a programme for the construction of social housing known as the *Serviço Ambulatório de Apoio Local* (SAAL — Local Ambulatory Support Service). Launched by the first Provisional Government, in 1974, this housing programme in the city of Porto had the School of Fine Arts as its epicentre for the discussion of projects with the underprivileged populations. Led by architects adopting a participatory methodology, SAAL was inspired by Henri Lefebvre's «right to the city» and sought to build houses in the city centre, running counter to the European tendency to shift the least favoured population to the periphery of the large cities.

Under tremendous political pressure of a reactionary nature and practically without any funding, the SAAL programme did not last more than two years, leaving many projects unfinished. The little that was built in Porto increased the sense of community with the creation of well-structured public and collective spaces to compensate for the tiny areas of the domestic space that was built. Contrasting with the

density of the collective housing built in other countries in the postwar period, the SAAL homes (such as the Bairro de São Victor, designed by Siza Vieira with students) were based on the idea of the collective at the scale of the small community, without underestimating the importance of the house as an expression of privacy and family autonomy.

The exercises based on the experience of the Survey and the practice of the SAAL programme demonstrate the social activism that was felt in the academic context. But the intensely partisan atmosphere of the Porto School of Fine Arts did not allow room for other proposals less compromised with *realistic socialism*. An example of this is the project developed in 1975 by two students, Mário Ramos and Fernando Barroso, who, under the influence of Guy Debord and the situationists, proposed a project entitled “Insurreccional Organisation of the Space” for the most central avenue in the city of Porto.

The avenue in question (Avenida dos Aliados) is the place where the City Hall is located, together with the banks, insurance companies and newspaper headquarters. Critics of architecture as an exclusive representation of the established powers, proposed a disruptive

project that consisted of half-burying the avenue, creating a dysfunctional topography that would be incompatible with the circulation of traffic. The manifesto for the “Insurreccional Organisation of the Space” project started out as a criticism of modern and functional urbanism, laying claim to the public space as a place of sharing, a place for playing, simultaneously demanding an alternative way of life to the idea of production and progress that underpins capitalist society. As Debord used to say, “ne travaillez jamais!”.

It was, in a certain way, under the influence of the prevailing atmosphere at the Porto School of Fine Arts in the 1960s and 1970s that Elvira Leite went out into the streets of one of the city’s most deprived neighbourhoods to provide an educational service of an artistic nature, open to participation, trusting the children and their creativity, and adopting a critical but also hopeful outlook towards the world. The stage of this theatre could only be the street because, more than the school, it was accessible to everyone, stimulating the acknowledgement of, and greater proximity to, the other. The appropriation of the street as a public space, necessarily implied a negotiation, promoting a greater awareness of democratic responsibility.



But this generation of children grew together with the country and gained their own economic power. They filled the streets with cars, bought houses with garages on the periphery of the city. Between 1980 and 2000, Porto lost more than 60,000 inhabitants. The precarious and aged population that remained is now becoming the target of gentrification, further exacerbated by the pressures from tourism. The streets are filled with people, but not with inhabitants. The sense of community is fast disappearing. Now no-one seems to let their children play in the public space, interact with strangers, or allow themselves to be photographed. The fear of the street originated at home, on the television, and ironically children have exchanged the perceived insecurity of the streets for the seductions of the social media and virtual games.

In her methodology based on greater proximity to the neighbourhood life, Elvira Leite began by photographing and offering the images that she took to the people that she photographed. Awakening the trust engendered by this inaugural attitude seemed to be a way of restoring an image of the community and giving it back to them. But photography was also the pretext for Elvira Leite to make herself known to the community and to involve children and adults in the construction of her participatory projects.

In terms of human relationships, the restoration of the public space (in the sense of its being a space for debate) that she produced with the children of Largo de Pena Ventosa still makes sense at this time of transition that we are living today, because of the opportunity that it provides for taking a critical look at our place both in the physical and virtual world. Each person’s inventive capacity, fed by their past and present reality must allow for the conception of, and participation in stimulating projects that offer a glimpse of the future. Today, the revolution will consist in our being able to summon up all of our senses with the aim of bringing utopias into play in everyday life.

Images

Ana Maria Gama, *Exercise of Analytic Architecture*, 1968. Centro de Documentação FAUP
Ilda Maria Duque, *Exercise of Analytic Architecture*, 1968. Centro de Documentação FAUP
Alexandre Alves Costa, *Meeting of residents at the Fine Art School of Porto*, 25 de Janeiro 1975. Centro de Documentação 25 Abril
Fernando Barroso and Mário Ramos, *Insurreccional Organisation of the Space*, 1975

Maria Elvira Vieira Pereira Leite was born in Porto, Portugal, in 1936. She concluded her degree in Painting at the Escola Superior de Belas Artes do Porto (ESBAP), in 1964. As a student, she was selected to participate in all ESBAP annual exhibitions. Her work was included in the Portuguese representation to the VIII S. Paulo Biennial of 1965. Elvira Leite was awarded the National Prize for Painting in 1968. Albeit her very early artistic success, Elvira Leite chose to become a teacher after concluding studies in Pedagogic Science at the University of Porto in 1964. After 1976, in addition to her job as a high school teacher, she dedicated herself to activities of cultural diffusion. She acted as consultant of UNESCO for art teaching in Portuguese-speaking countries; was invited by the Portuguese government to plan and coordinate training for Portuguese emigrant women in different countries; was a fellow of the Gulbenkian Foundation to create art educational materials. After retirement, Elvira Leite was a consultant of Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis, of the Regional Traditional Arts Centre and of the Educational Service of the Fundação de Serralves. Elvira Leite published extensively in the field of art education, usually in collaboration with artists or other educators.

In recognition of Elvira Leite outstanding contribution to education she was awarded, in 2004, the Order of Infante D. Henrique by the President of Portugal.

PEDRO BANDEIRA is an architect and Associate Professor at the School of Architecture of the University of Minho and researcher member of Lab2PT. Author of several publications in the field of architecture such as *Porto School: B side* (2014) and *Power Architecture* (Lars Muller, 2017). In 2014 he co-founded the publishing house Pierrot le Fou.

JOANA NASCIMENTO holds a master in Art and Design for Public Space by the Faculty of Fine Arts of University of Porto. She is art educator at Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art where she met Elvira Leite. She collaborates with BOA — Bombarda Oficina de Artes since 2013.

LÚCIA ALMEIDA MATOS is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Porto (FBAUP), Portugal, where she coordinates the MA program in Art Studies and directs FBAUP art collection and exhibitions program. Her research interests are focused on the documentation of production, display and reception of modern and contemporary art and the development of strategies to improve public access to collections. She also has a professional and academic interest in curating research-based exhibitions.

SUSANA LOURENÇO MARQUES (PhD), designer and assistant Professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Porto. Recent publications include *Pó, Cinza e Nevoeiro*, ensaio sobre a ausência (2018) and *Ether/um laboratório de fotografia e história* (2018). In 2014 she co-founded the publishing house Pierrot le Fou.

SOFIA VICTORINO is the Daskalopoulos Director of Education and Public Programmes at Whitechapel Gallery, London. She was previously Head of Education at Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, where she worked with Elvira Leite from 2002 to 2011.

Pedagogy of the streets, Porto 1977

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Texts
Pedro Bandeira
Elvira Leite
Susana Lourenço Marques
Lúcia Almeida Matos
Joana Nascimento
Sofia Victorino

Editing and layout
Susana Lourenço Marques
Luis Pinto Nunes

Scans
Lumen

Translation
John Elliot
Elena Zagar Galvão

Design
Márcia Novais

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