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# Summary

This book places Siza within the context of the Modern Movement, isolated principles of which were found to have been continued into the present; his seemingly close relation between the earlier pioneers of the early 1920's and 1930's is discussed, their spirit of humanism being akin to his and Aalto's, transposed into the commercialism of the 1980's. A section on Portugal places the architect within his context, limiting the historical discussion to the 'Plain Style' which occurred during the 16th to the early 18th centuries, as well as to the rise of modernism which took place in the 1920's – 1940's. Two specific examples of his works are examined: his banks at Oliveira de Azeméis and at Vila do Conde. His oeuvre and design method is then compared to a known master, Aalto, who has been isolated due to comparable positions within the rise of modernism, and similar positions related to site considerations. The differences are also discussed, Aalto being used as a method of comparison. The book ends with an interview which hopes to confirm or deny the hypotheses put forward by this work.

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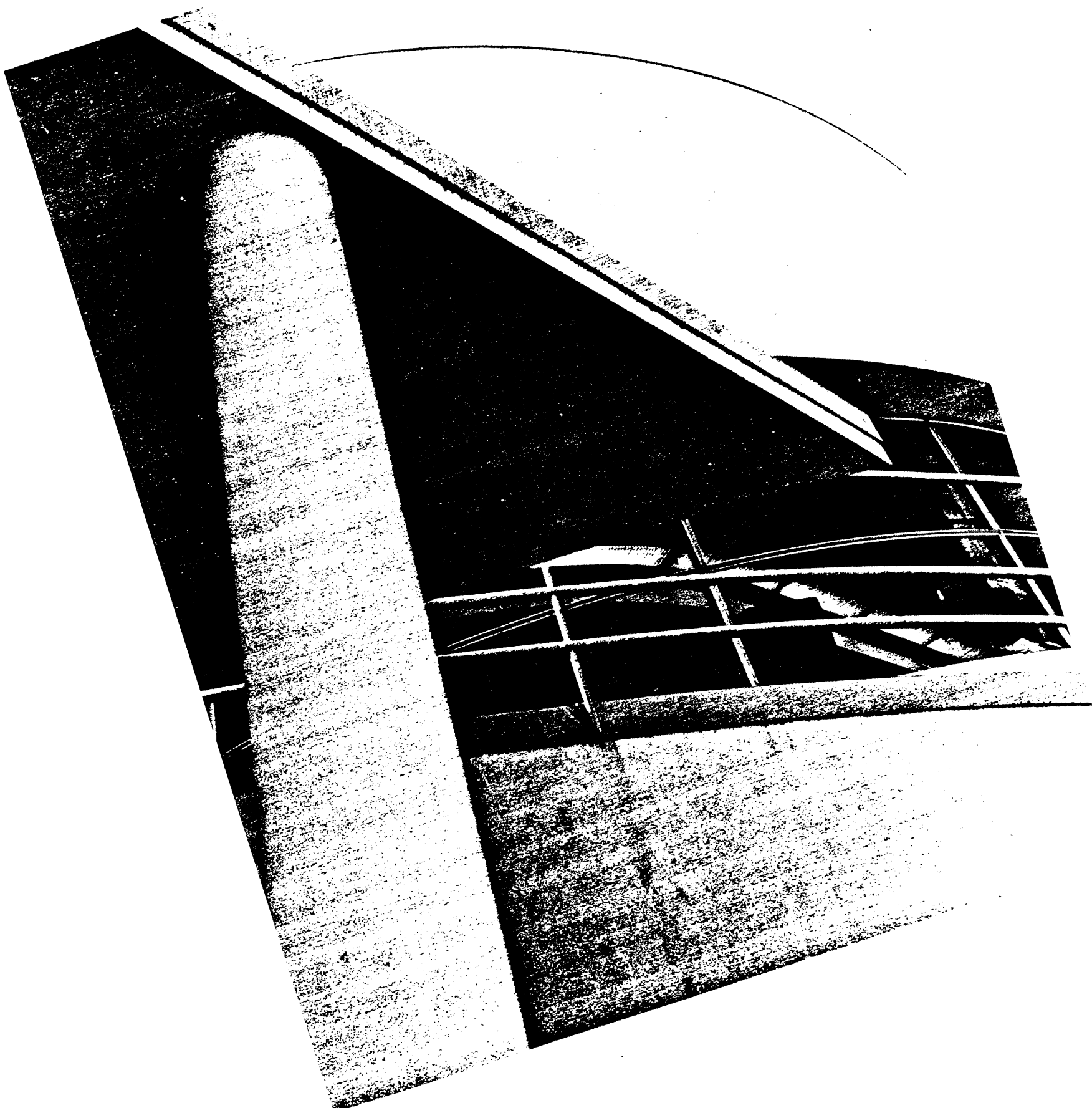
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at Vila do Conde

A prerequisite for this piece of writing does exist though his work is not widely known and I have not examined it in its entirety. Unless previous knowledge of Siza's architecture is available, either first-hand or via literary sources, I will refer the reader to a film entitled "Siza in Space, Time and Technicolour", made for this purpose. It hopes to make his seemingly difficult buildings, when interpreted by architectural drawings, more accessible, and attempts to capture both the visual and the spatial experiences of his two banks in particular, as well as including images of his native Portuguese context.

This work sets out to examine the following hypothesis: the possibility of Siza's affiliation to the early pioneers of modernism belonging to the 20's and 30's, who possessed a communal idealism based on architecture being a social art. This is demonstrated by an obvious social conscience, and by works of architecture which can be described as humanist. Siza can be seen to belong to this period, but frozen in time. In terms of spatial dynamics and planning he has further evolved, and has created for himself a particular niche within the twentieth century. The credibility of this hypothesis is determined by another: architecture must be seen to be an art based on the existence of universal principles, which I will call 'principles of the modern', which are the basis for the spirit of the modern, the underlying thread of this book.

*Post Modern or late modern like  
essence of MVRDV  
New York*

This particular study has been prompted by my own need for self-education with respect to the development of the Modern Movement in architecture, but it uses, as a point of reference, the work of an architect who, in my opinion, has created an architecture of seriousness, still concerned with experimentation.

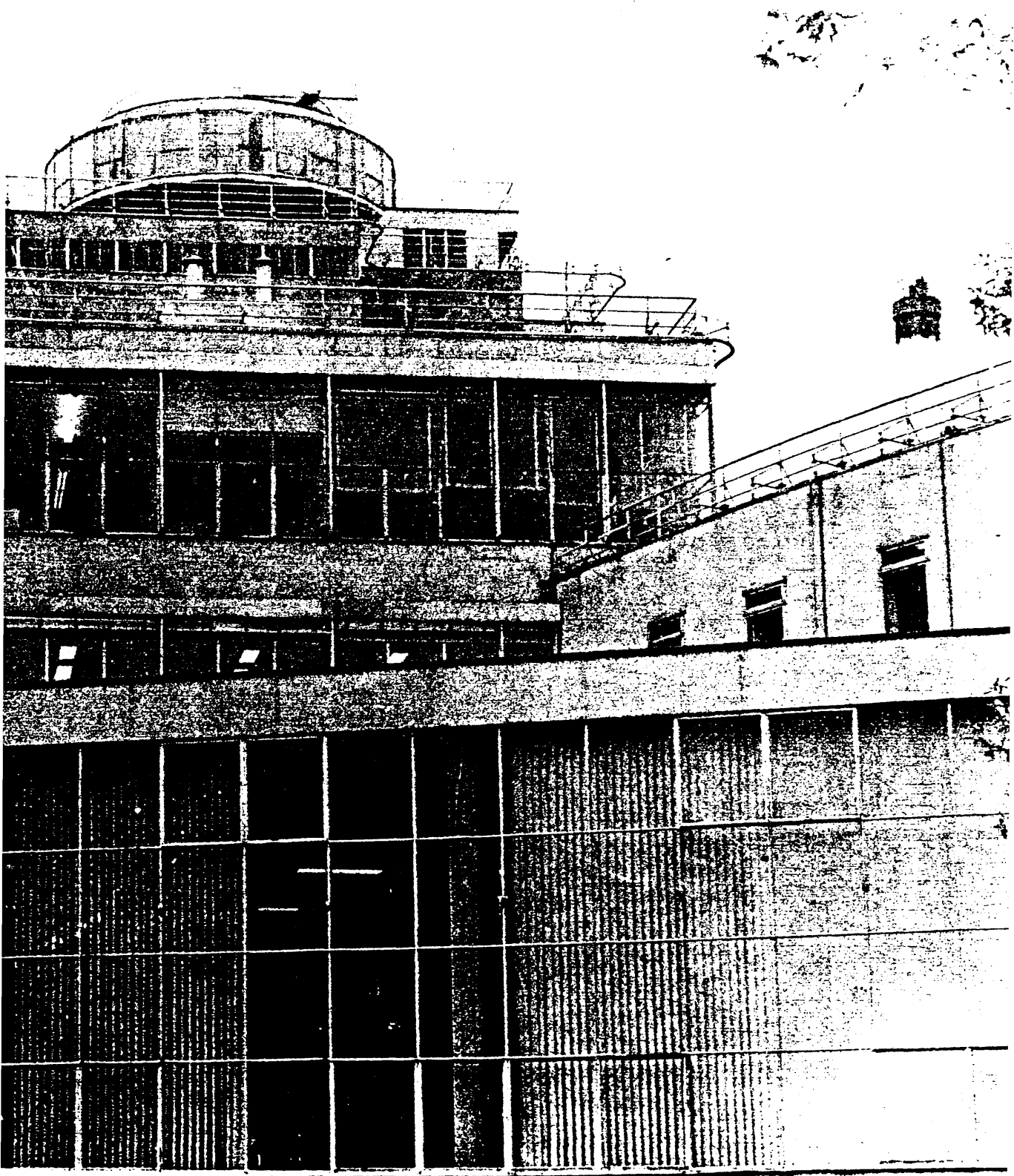
Part 1 takes the form of a brief retrospective of the Modern Movement, discussing it in terms of common understandings, ideals, philosophical stances, and aims, in order to identify and establish the elusive 'spirit' of the modern. The 'spirit' to which I refer is irrespective of time, national boundaries and cultural differences. It is common ground amongst some architects, either conceptually or philosophically, and it has to do with humanistic tendencies. It is elusive because it is difficult to determine objectively, due to its impossibility to be discussed on a technical level, a level on which many architects might feel more secure. It is, however, an important concept to consider since it is a unifying element in architecture, despite its nebulous and rare character, and it helps to describe the art of architecture. This part attempts to site Siza within the spirit of the modern, noting both similarities and differences; in order to do this I must briefly retrace the path taken by modern architects in the past. Many questions will be asked of the modern; certain principles developed by the rich heritage of visionaries and practitioners, who existed throughout the twentieth century, will be isolated. These principles are universal to the architects' works that I have chosen as representative, and have been carried through into this century by a select few, of which Siza is an example.

Part 2 will comprise a chapter on Portugal, and forms a description of the history and context within which Siza works; Part 3 includes an examination of two of his buildings in terms of modern principles within the context of Portuguese history; Part 4 incorporates a comparative study isolating a previous master as a standard, in an attempt to evaluate Siza's work qualitatively. The final section includes an interview with the architect which, it is hoped, will further elucidate his relative position in terms of the present architectural situation. It will also act as a test of what is proposed by this piece of writing.

I will try to limit my exploration, as far as possible, to European tendencies in an attempt to contain the analysis and will, therefore, resist the temptation to cross the waters, but references will have to be made since significant and innovative developments were occurring simultaneously which, in certain instances, anticipated European movements.

Also in an effort to limit the field, I will concentrate on expressionist and rationalist tendencies within the Modern Movement which give rise to parallels with which to compare Siza's work.

Siza's work developed within the architectural milieu, noting trends but displaying a more critical approach. He evolved in a manner reminiscent of the earlier pioneers of the twenties and thirties, who broke with tradition without ever destroying or maligning it. He transformed certain principles which I describe as modern without ever becoming a prisoner to either the architectural styles of his immediate present, or to the Portuguese national building tradition which he has always respected. Instead, he re-appraises, re-develops and transforms the architectural systems of the past into relevant ones for the present.



Nelle Factory

## Siza Within the 'Spirit of the Modern'

**"The art of architecture is a human creation. Architecture, this human creation, is in fact, only an application of principles born outside us and which we appropriate to ourselves by observation." \***

\* Eugène Viollet - le - Duc

Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française

Volume VIII. "Style" p. 480

The idea of a 'modern architecture' should not be regarded solely as a twentieth century phenomenon since a similar process of re-thinking, of a re-substitution of a new code, of different aspirations, and of a definite anti-historical trait, occurred continually throughout history. These epochs questioned the past: its intentions its meanings, in order to establish its relevance to the present. Many of the architects of these periods possessed a unique understanding of the conflicts between technology, theory and accepted practice, and exploited these. They commonly included ideas from outside the discipline of architecture, thereby the ideas and intentions of the 'modern' were propagated through time, into the present. 'Modern' in architecture can thus be described as in continuous evolution, where principles and images are carried through history and are selectively re-applied.

Throughout history, one realizes the multi-faceted role of architecture; of being capable of satisfying many roles, some of which were questioned throughout time. Siza's work forces us to ask these same questions of architecture: can a building function on different levels, and if so how is this achieved; can it perform as sculpture, as art object, as monument and still satisfy all program requirements? Siza has developed forms to be multi-functional, capable of being purely sculptural. As well, his work proposes the possibility of a 'type', both self-referential and referring subtly to the context. This will be discussed in greater detail in Part 3.

I must now define what I mean by 'modern principles'. Many of these have been incorporated, either in full or in part, by many architects past and present; principles by which I have isolated both architects and their works for comparison. I would define these principles as: a break from traditional designs and form (the cube, purely rectilinear geometries) which would result in a freeing of the plan; a three-dimensional

*7. historic preservation  
emulation*

use of space not simply relying on enclosure to define architecture (this is Le Corbusier's interpenetration); an innovative use of materials of the epoch; the possibility of a system, an anti-system or hybrids to exist side by side in a loose conceptual framework; an innovative use of history by building upon its achievements and including them when appropriate to the context, including a re-invention of its modes; a painterly use of composition, both as a mode for the re-integration of the building into the older fabric, as well as in terms of form and elevation; and, finally, experimentation with 'form' and enclosing walls. These principles will have been either accepted, rejected, rediscovered (much in the same way that I have rethought them and added ones appropriate to this era), adapted or transformed. We will also investigate the evolution of several of the most important principles: 'composition' both volumetric and two-dimensional, and the 'explosion of the box' or the three-dimensional aspect of space.

Composition is vital to the messages relayed by both building volumes and the façades. It is one of the modern principles that has been transposed through time, consciously developed by some and denigrated by others. Robert Morris in 1734 was the first to recognize the term 'composition', but it was only with Robert Adam that the term became more general. With Adam, composition was associated with movement. "Movement is meant to express the rise and fall, the advance and recess, with the other diversity in form, in the different parts of a building; so as to add greatly to the effect of the composition." (1) He also wrote: "Movement also serves to produce an agreeable and diversified contour that groups and contrasts like a picture and creates a variety of light and shade which gives great spirit, beauty and effect to the composition." (2) Mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw a change in this attitude; it became one that



accepted a variety of associations and appearances derived from functions. Gaudet emphasized the importance of composition in 1902. Ruskin reserved the term 'composition' for that "false composition which can be taught on principles." (3) Frank Lloyd Wright wrote: "Composition is dead, that creation may live." (4)



The two extremes of two - dimensional composition can be seen as being the Beaux Arts system: a classical one defining organization in terms of primary and secondary axis, and the 'picturesque' method as described by Choisy in 1899. The 'picturesque' method is a very filmic approach to architecture since it was dependent on the progression of subsequent frames, each as 'picturesque' as the next. It had most to do with the pleasure of the eye, and was a totally different way of seeing and of sensing architecture: the most important factor being not 'function' but 'pleasure'. The 'pleasure' must be visible from the exterior: the progression from outside to inside must induce pleasure. Site was a very important constituent of this progression. This brings to mind the work of the Mexican architect, Luis Barragán, whose building objects and site complement and refer to each other in many complex configurations (Fig. 1). His architecture also refers to nature, and forms a part of the landscape. Choisy compares this technique or way of seeing with 'Nature's way': those subjective values with respect to the balancing of composition occurring naturally in Nature. (5)

The 'picturesque' within the twentieth century took a different form in order to include the town setting, best illustrated by Aalto, but with him the visual aspect was not the only factor since 'pleasure' was also described by the intellectual factor supplied by his personal concept of nature. Aalto viewed nature as a standard, and included many references to it. He allowed nature to take hold so to speak; much the same way Siza views transformations to

*Cavaller + Co*

be possible on site, not allowing the drawings to be finite but allowing what he calls 'contamination' of the purity of the scheme to occur either by craftsmen, by nature or by the inhabitants (the latter within reason).(6)

The term 'painterly' has been defined by Fernand Léger; its meaning can be extrapolated from this description: "Every machine-object possesses two material qualities: one which is often painted and light absorbent, is fixed (architectural value) and the other (most frequently bare metal) which reflects light, fulfills the role of limitless fantasy (painterly value)." (7)

A break from traditional design and form, innovative use of materials of the epoch, and the painterly use of composition, can be isolated as the main principles that inspired Abbé de Cordemoy. He expressed in 1706 that the column could stand alone and also suggested, like Adolf Loos two hundred years later, that ornamentation of certain buildings was unnecessary.(8) This marked the beginning of an emphasis on form and compositional skills rather than on ornamentation, and is the precedent for many, but particularly Loos, Le Corbusier, Hoffmann, Olbrich and Wagner.

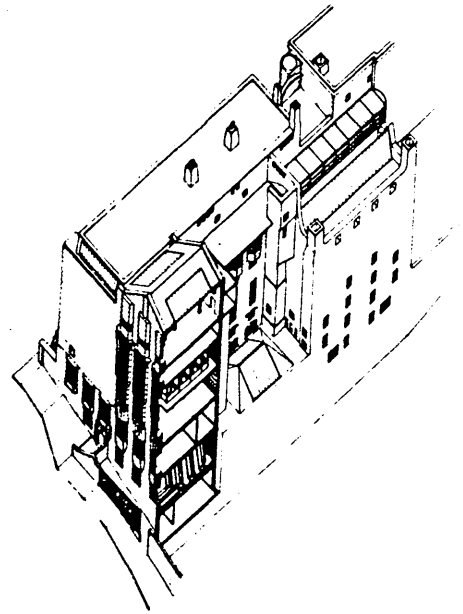
Labrouste in 1830 insisted on the primacy of structure and on the derivation of ornamentation from construction.(9) Art Nouveau also used this premise, to a different degree, in devising the sometimes opulent embellishment of buildings. Horta in Belgium, Guimard in France, the English Arts and Craft including Voysey, Lethaby, Townsend and others, as well as the Austrians: Wagner, Olbrich and Hoffmann, further embellished their façade. This was not confined to the exterior but was integral with the rich interiors which were inspired by nature and its plant forms, the most expressive of these tendencies being Horta and Guimard. Guimard wrote:

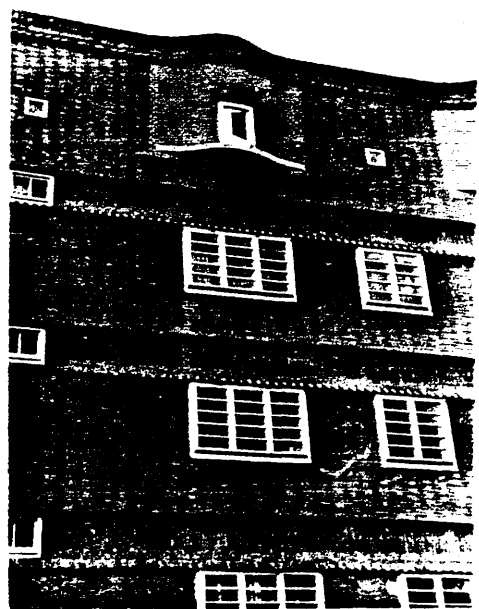
"Nature is not parallel and symmetrical." Mackintosh, the great Scottish component of Art Nouveau actually anticipated de Stijl and other avant-garde movements by his cubistic façades, his elevational compositions which not only refer back to Scottish architectural styles, but can be seen as to describe the urban context.

The most eloquent example is the Glasgow Art School, integrating history with the future and including beautifully crafted interiors (Fig. 2). The Scandinavian counterpart to 'Art Nouveau' was more akin to the Dutch, for both were greatly inspired by traditional folk architecture. They will be discussed in more detail in Part 4, when discussing Aalto and his relation to Siza.

The primacy of structure and the derivation of ornamentation from construction was also firmly believed by Berlage (also Sullivan and Wright) and by his followers, some of whom constituted the 'Amsterdam School': De Klerk, Van der Meij, and Kramer. Berlage and the 'Amsterdam School's work involved an innovative use of history, which included a masterly technique of carving in both stone and brick. Berlage managed to unite a certain expressionism of form without masking the essence of the building, that is, its structure or framework (Fig. 3). He denigrated stucco because it hid construction; smooth faced brick because it concealed the essence of brick, its roughness. The roughness of brick, according to Berlage in 1905, was more akin to 'naturalness' and to 'man's integrity'.(10) It was an honest exponent of building whereas stucco was false and introduced a 'false security', not necessarily inherent. Berlage's general ideas were extrapolated from the writings of Ruskin, Semper and Viollet-le-Duc.

Theodor Adorno wrote that in truth everything had its place, even ornament, because ornament was born of a certain need, a certain use; that this was embellished to create ornament; that the use was existant.(11) Therefore, if I interpret Adorno





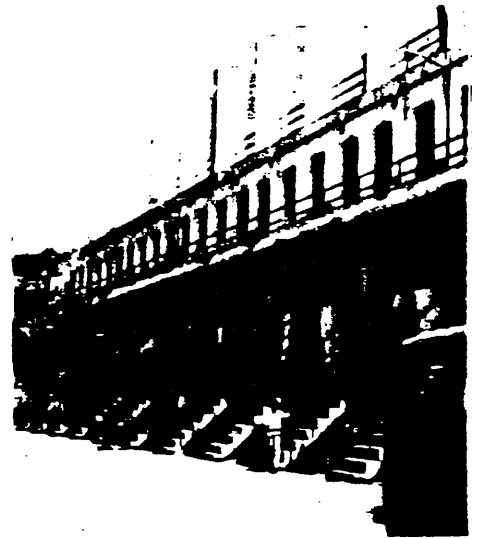
correctly, in the same way there might arise a need for which polished brick is necessary, and even stucco. Certain circumstances might force its use; either clarity or unity of forms might cause the need. Siza's use of stucco causes the unifying element to be simplified. His buildings are pure form, and stucco is the extension of the form's abstraction. The form becomes simpler and more powerful using the simplicity of stucco, thus resulting in the enveloping façades. The façades are thus linked to form a 'wrap-around' of the interior. The image is assured of its clarity (Fig. 4). Perhaps, in the end, it becomes a question of the ephemeral and the non-universal: 'taste'.

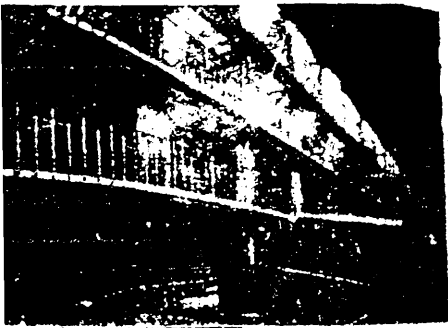
De Klerk, Van der Meij and Kramer, chief architects of the Amsterdam School, broke free from the calm and sobriety of Berlage's teaching into a more expressive form, although their respect for him remained. The Spaardammerbuurt (third block, 1917-1920) in west Amsterdam by De Klerk, along with the Dageraad housing (1920-1923) in south Amsterdam by Kramer (part of Berlage's town plan for the area), are the most representative of this 'escape', and are, in my opinion, their most inventive (Fig. 5). They idealize housing modules. The plans themselves remain quite standard in area, restrictive due to necessity, but are carefully modulated by beautiful detailing. De Klerk and Kramer, therefore, adhered to Berlage's writings in that the buildings are 'honest', construction not being hidden. They bared them of stucco but elaborated the façades in their attempt to individualize the housing block, creating 'homes' out of housing, art out of repetition (Fig. 6). The need for embellishment was there. Siza also produced a social housing 'type' which was restrictive by necessity due to tight site and accommodation requirements. No elaborate detailing was used but his architectural 'escape' lay in the elaboration of the differences between the main and rear elevations. They are of equal importance in that both portray contrasting

characters: the front elevation suggesting a more ceremonious entry; the rear elevation, day-to-day entry or exit. The elevation on the public 'street' is formal due to its use of repetition, subtle, inspiring calm and tranquility, but the composition, despite its careful proportioning and small scale, reflects the metropolis in the same way that De Klerk's housing blocks do. Mini-skyscrapers are pitted against an urban wall, the configuration set against the backdrop of the historical city of Porto (Fig. 7). The rear elevation suggests greater excitement, involving personal balconies, less private balconies and stairs, all included in the articulated urban wall (Fig. 8).



The mid - nineteenth century 'structural classicists', of which Labrouste was a part, also Cordemoy, Laugier, and Soufflot, believed the essence of architecture lay in its construction. (12) Ornamentation and stylistic differences were said to be the logical development of construction. Even the representational techniques of these forefathers were similar: the depiction of the building in axonometric projection, stressing synthesis and unity by the simultaneous viewing of plan, section and elevation. This is one of the 'invariables' described by Bruno Zevi, one of his principles defining the 'modern'. This simultaneous viewing of the building object he calls 'anti-perspective three-dimensionality'.(13) The 'structural classicists' were echoed over a century later by the twentieth century modernists, including the Werkbund (Fig. 9). (14) The Werkbund was an association of crafts and industry; its birth can be pinpointed as being 1907. Its members included Tessenow who proposed a return to primary form, as well as Obrist and Poelzig (Fig. 10). Poelzig wrote: "Let us rather be impractical if we wish a ray of our creative activity to strike the human soul."(15) To Poelzig, architecture was play of the highest order: "While we appear to be playing we produce our most sublime creations."(16) The effect of





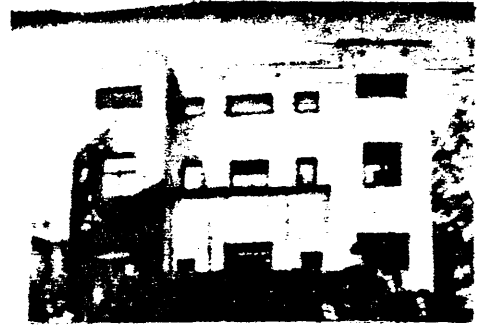
architecture, he says, is an emotional one: like music, one will react to it; one will become involved in the same way. The technical is not the emotive aspect, to him it was form. We will shortly see how Aalto had a similar philosophy. He, and others such as Van de Velde, had expressionistic tendencies. This tendency will shortly be explained. Van de Velde developed three empirical rules: complementary contrast, repulsion and attraction (similar to van Doesburg's extremes) and, lastly, the desire to give the negative forms (ground) the same degree of significance as the positive forms (figure).(17) Behrens, also part of the Werkbund, developed from being interested in Tuscan Romanesque to stricter form concerns, in order to create typologies for the metropolis (Fig. 11). The Werkbund were anti-avant-garde, anti-theoretical in their search for a dignified form. (18)

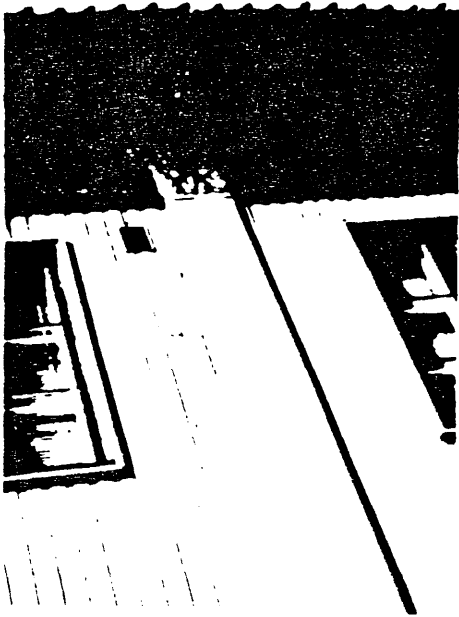
The 'romantic classicists' (mid-nineteenth century), in which grouping Ledoux, Boullée and Gilly figured, stressed the character of form; this recurred with the Expressionists in the early part of the twentieth century (Fig. 12).(19) On form, Fiedler wrote: "Materials and constructions continue to recede, while the form, which belongs to the intellect, continues to develop towards an increasingly independent existence."(20) 'Expressionism' was defined by Kasimir Edschmid as "a requirement of the spirit. It is not a program of style. It is a problem of the soul and therefore of humanity."(21) It was founded in Germany, and existed in several strains ranging from a highly anti-technological one looking back to medieval times, à la Ruskin, to the Futurists, such as Sant'Elia; it included Mendelsohn, Scharoun, Poelzig and Sartoris to mention a few. It was a very romantic movement believing in an ideal moral and social order. Sartoris attempted to locate 'modern architecture' in history. He attempted to remain within his classical tradition, incorporating principles of tradition and history since he believed that certain rules should be kept

constant, but he encouraged the inventiveness of Art Nouveau and the Secession. His work can be seen to have involved the re-interpretation of Neo-classicism.

Another transformation of the 'modern' occurred when Loos used different and opposing architectural languages which were never resolved, which marks the beginning of the system/anti-system development. An example of this is his Steiner house in Vienna, built in 1910, and his house on the Sauraugasse, Vienna, built in 1913. Restrained façades mask a very imaginative interior, thus creating an opposition of the exterior versus the interior. A further transformation occurred with the 'hybrids', Aalto and Siza. (Fig. 13). The term 'hybrid' is used to suggest different uses of organizational systems which can occur side by side, the inclusion of historical fragments, or contradictory juxtapositions of, for example, exterior façade versus interior... This will be further clarified.

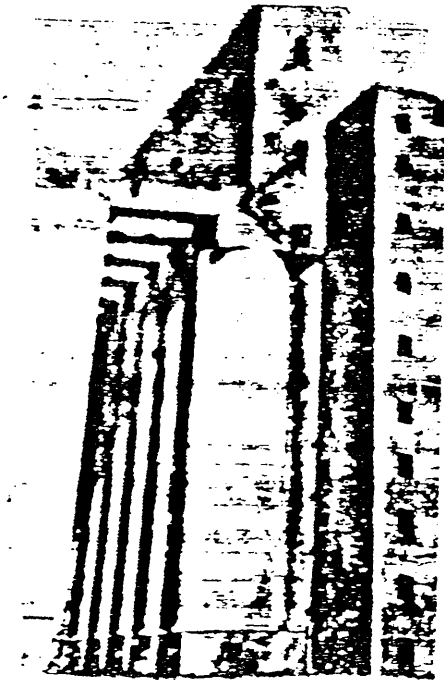
The initiators of the modern movement shared a certain frustration with the past, and a refusal to accept present architectural conditions. Their architecture took many forms; it was based on specific principles, rules, or philosophies of their own making. Each broke differently with the past in order to create an architecture of relevance, based on changes which had occurred politically, culturally and socially. What made this a unique period of history was the cumulative development that took place, irrespective of boundaries. It was a far-reaching explosion of architectural ideals on a large scale, none of which was isolated. It is important to realize that this philosophical union of architectural minds was due to a collective social conscience that existed, as well as to political aspirations. Both of these colour their architecture, rendering it more meaningful; resulting in serious, experimental and often poetic architecture. There is a clear transposition of ideals and of principles of the 'modern' throughout time due to this





spirit of 'humanism'. This will be discussed in greater detail in Parts 2, 3 and 5.

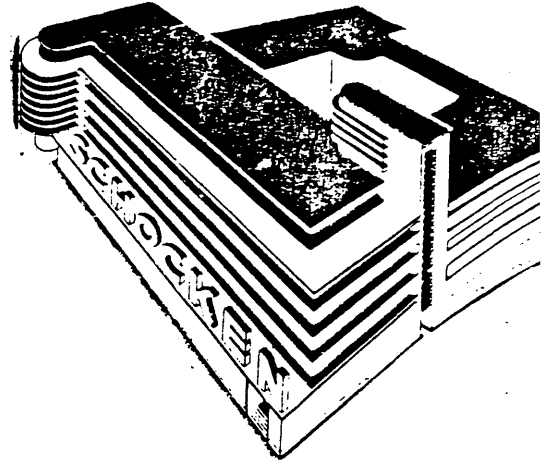
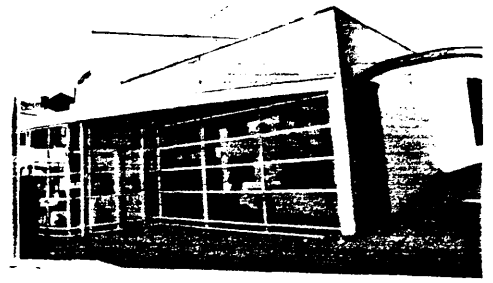
Some modernists, such as Le Corbusier, broke vehemently with the past, developing a personal code which he hoped would become universal, interested as he was in a universal architecture, based on man's module. Others, such as Mendelsohn, were more concerned with form. Taut and Häring developed more social and political philosophies, and also turned against past architectural traditions. Other examples, primarily Aalto, whose work essentially developed out of the simple Scandinavian tradition, made references to history, and can thus be seen as direct descendants of past traditions transposed through time in an evolutive process (Fig. 14). The modern architects of the early twentieth century had the added excitement particular to their era, that of the 'new Age': a new technological age whose pristine industrial forms inspired them. Architects, such as Le Corbusier, Taut, Mendelsohn, the Futurists and the constructivists, to name but a few, saw in them the forms of a new symbolism (Fig. 15) As Konstantin Melnikov, a leading constructivist wrote: "Architecture depends on no a priori laws, nor can it be subordinated to the capricious dictates of utility."(22) They were all serious in their intent to create forms of a new and truly modern architecture.



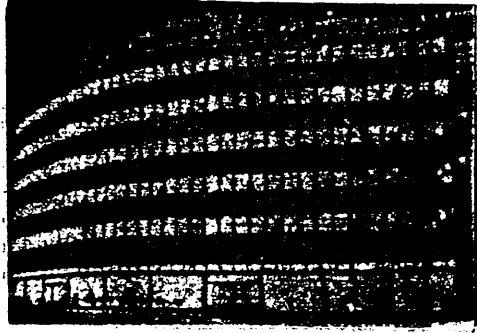
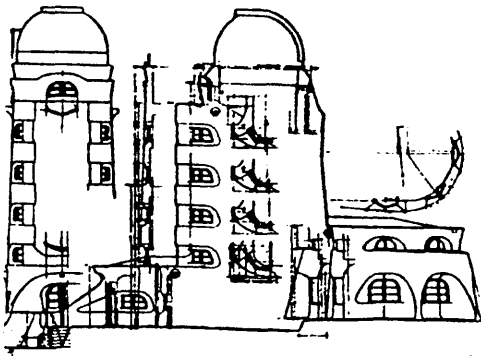
Siza did not forcefully break with the fabric of the past, neither the inherited traditions of the Modern Movement nor his Portuguese heritage, but instead further developed the language, individualizing and enriching the forms. He is proof of the 'modern' since principles, thoughts, are not lost with the onward march of time, but become almost a part of the subconscious. This assumes that one is either willing or discerning enough to allow these to become part of one's sensitivity.



We will begin our specific exploration of these principles and of the 'spirit of the modern' via the architect Mendelsohn, whose work can be seen as continued into the present epoch by Siza (as well as by a few others). Naturally, differences between the two exist, and we see a further evolution in Siza's work (Fig. 16). Both Mendelsohn and later Siza further developed principles of form and composition but to different degrees. Siza evolved somewhat in the expressionistic spirit of Mendelsohn, differences occurring in the further abstraction of the façades. Techniques such as the use of pronounced cornice lines, much used by Mendelsohn in the Petersdorff store in Breslau, Germany (1927-1928), never formed part of Siza's vocabulary. We will examine Mendelsohn in order to define the differences and, in so doing, identify the evolution.



Mendelsohn exemplified the romantic, the more personal response to architecture. He believed that a building was an organism alive with bands of transparency juxtaposed with solid bands, resulting in the subtly modulating façades. This was particularly evident in the Schocken store, Stuttgart, built in 1926-1928 (Fig. 17). This philosophical belief, that the building was an organism implying movement, was the essence of Baroque Expressionism. Through time, according to Mendelsohn, a building undergoes a transformation. Albert Einstein, who wrote that "Objects do not exist in space, although they are spatially extensive", (23) inspired him to develop this theory for architecture. He realized that to be spatially extensive the building cannot be seen to project a predisposed form but must acquire a form through time. This is an interesting parallel to Siza's working philosophy, which he discussed in an interview with A.A. (*L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*), in which he said that, while sketching at his drawing board, two operations were taking place simultaneously: the first being the visual recording of the idea, that is sketch acting as communication media and, the second, the constant modification



of the idea in terms of context.(24) For Siza, the building is like a sculpture, allowing the design process to continue on site, but the building to be in constant transformation.

Mendelsohn's earlier work, the Einstein Tower of Potsdam, Germany (1917-1921) is seen to be an organism, a biological organism capable of movement and transformation(Fig. 18).

His later buildings, particularly the Schocken store at Chemnitz, portray a more subdued expressionism; the façades still being capable of movement but of a more subtle nature (Fig. 19).

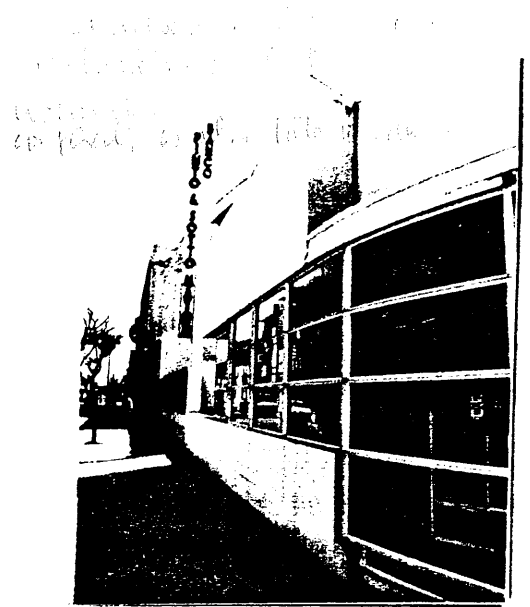
Siza displays a far greater restraint; his façades are abstracted. The bank at Oliveira de Axeméis(1971-1974) is a comparable example: still capable of movement, but one based on a more rhythmic composition; the flat façades not physically modulated as in Baroque, but exposing a latent dynamism, relying more on the rhythmic disposition in the relationship of openings to compositional planes (Fig. 20).

It is primarily the form which is expressionistic; when comparing Mendelsohn's Schocken store (Chemnitz, 1928-1930) to Siza's Oliveira de Azeméis bank (Oliveira de Azeméis Portugal, 1971-1974), both buildings follow a curvilinear path but to different extents, the path of the Schocken store being more accentuated. Therefore, one can deduce that where Mendelsohn relies on a simpler system: a combination of the curvilinear form, using regularized bands of glazing to solid, Siza can be seen to have taken this a step further: building up his composition in a more 'painterly' fashion. Siza employs a non-regular system but a compositionally interesting transition from solid, to semi-solid, to a completely glazed wall section. Instead of continuing the glazed portion of the elevation around the corner, as Mendelsohn has done in the Schocken store at Chemnitz, Siza interrupts its purity by including a solid band (Fig. 21). Instead of carrying through the solid band at roof level to produce a

certain regularity, he chooses to interrupt it, thus rendering the glazed portion more prominent. He builds up the volumetric composition of the building in this example, defying simplicity much in the same way Aalto developed a great number of his buildings. This will be shown in Part 4. Both Mendelsohn and Siza have evolved compositional skills which I would call modern, but to different degrees and with different emphasis. Siza's system appears less ordered, less regular, involving the transformation of the walls into different planes of transparency.

Auguste Endell discussed form in terms of line: the vertical implying a greater tension and the horizontal, a more peaceful quality.(25) He systematically studied different window compositions, for example, and learnt that subdivisions could enhance tranquility or induce speed and, therefore, tension and excitement. The horizontality of Mendelsohn's Schocken Store enhances the tranquility, as the glazed bands reinforce the lines of horizontality. The bank at Oliveira de Azeméis, however, although also a horizontal composition destroys the tranquility by introducing tensions, almost negating its horizontality. This describes a compositional technique which depends on tensions and contradictions. Siza's example at Oliveira de Azeméis shows a further addition in the evolution of the principles of the 'modern' by developing the 'hybrid' possibilities, as well as experimenting both with composition as a tool for integrating the building into the older urban fabric, and with 'form' and the enclosing wall. Even when considering the Schocken store one also realizes that tranquility is denied by the expressive form, although it comes closer to it than Siza's bank at either Oliveira de Azeméis or at Vila do Conde, due to the repetitive bands of glazing to solid (Fig. 22).

One can see, therefore, in Siza's bank at Oliveira de Azeméis, the beginnings of an anti-system, when viewed from the



position occupied by Mendelsohn: that of the architectural hybrid. It can be seen to include a synthesis of a range of tendencies, from elements of Classicism to Expressionism. It also includes the possibility of the inclusion of historical associations or fragments, but in Siza's case this is only evident in his earlier buildings; for example, the tea-house at Boa Nova, or on the site of his housing project at Sao Victor, in Porto. It will be of great importance to isolate these tendencies in order to understand either their synthesis or their non-synthesis, to be seen in Part 4.

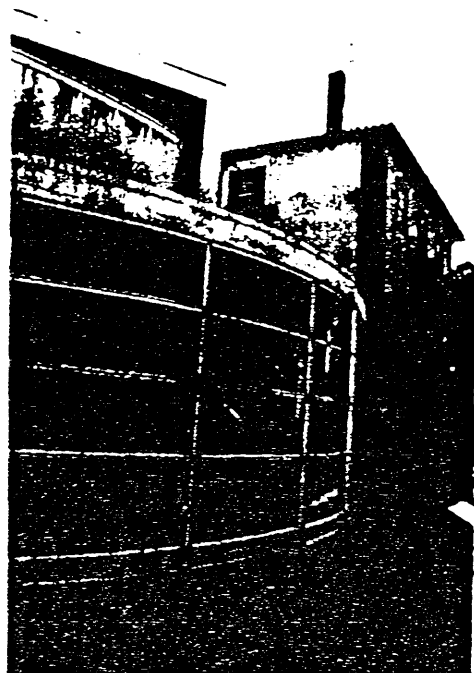
Mario Gandelsonas suggests that architecture never had a 'system', but many partial systems; for example, vertical and horizontal proportioning, varying openings, etc.(26) There is therefore no unity, no overall system, just a series of systems, made to appear unified through the use of building materials, architectonic interpenetration, or other aesthetic methods. This is, however, far truer for our present century for I feel that, in the past, although partial systems did exist, they were part of a conceptual framework which was the unifying element, and not merely a cursory aesthetic system. This existence of a conceptual model is, I feel, a major link between Siza and his earlier collaborators in the spirit of 'modernity'.

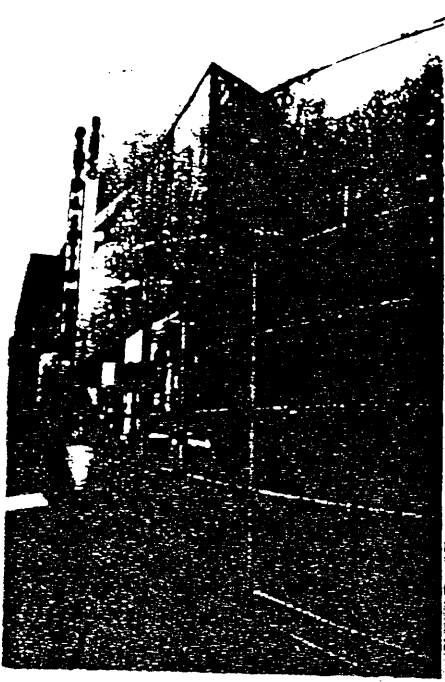
Joseph Rykwert expressed in his essay that "the whole idea of architecture is for the building to be a unified form, concept, a unity, where the construction is the idea, therefore it would be useless to pin a label so to speak onto a building because the label is in itself devoid of meaning. The building in its entirety is the meaning."(27) It is, however, of importance to discover the systems in use and for this the labels are essential to comprehend either the form or the internal organization. André Salmon wrote: "Schools disappear from lack of convenient labels. This is annoying to the public for it likes the

schools because they enable it to understand clearly without effort."(28) The building becomes the label so to speak, and may become the 'type'. This will be discussed in greater detail in Part 3.

The 'meaning' is first made evident via the façade since this is the first image of the building that we encounter. It is the first in the series of events that occurs and therefore requires specific attention. It can be itself a series of events: different planes of transparency either literal or phenomenal, a mask to the spaces beyond, or a careful balance of solid versus void.(29) In Mendelsohn's Schocken store in Stuttgart the transparency is literal, displaying the interior spaces of the store in keeping with the concept of the department store; that is, the uninhibited display of the latest wares. Siza's bank at either Oliveira de Azeméis or Vila do Conde would be an example of 'phenomenal transparency': it is non-specific in time, there is a sensing of transparency in the partially transparent façade which is internally partially masked by the complexity of the internal arrangement.(30) This is to do with the cubist painting tradition: ie. plane upon plane of transparency. This plays a great part in both composition of forms as well as the way in which the building is perceived. Cubism often displays a meshing together of two systems: a rectilinear one implying a geometricization, and a curvilinear one, having naturalistic significances. It is the intersection and the interlocking of these two systems that allows the development of a typical Cubist painting, and that helps define elements of Cubism in architecture. These grids give rise to planes, but planes of different transparencies, as seen in the bank at Oliveira de Azeméis to be discussed in more detail in Part 3 (Fig. 23)

Returning to the two façades in question, what we are confronted with is not pure Baroque, but a modernization of





baroque principles. According to Wölfflin, the most important characteristic of the Baroque is its painterly quality.(31) The freedom of line, the apparent movement of masses, together with the interplay of light and dark, gives the Baroque this quality. This description belongs to the Baroque period.

It deals with masses within a composition, a more sculptural and painterly response to architecture. Movement is dependent, in Siza's case, on the curved form whereas, in Mendelsohn's case, there is an even greater movement in the façade due to the amplification of the curved path by the horizontality and the regularity of the curved glazing lines, which reinforce the movement of the façade around the corner (Fig.24). Where we have, in the latter, a true synthesis of

exterior and interior in terms of movement and the integration of the façade with the interior, in the bank at Oliveira de Azeméis there is a reduction of the movement in relation to the exterior. We are left with a fragmentation of the true image of the building, which is perceived as a planar, subdued but expressionistic façade masking a highly complex, modulated interior. Certain hints are given via the partially transparent façade: glimpses of form, risers disappearing into the distance, sweeping curves, mysterious culminations and darkness (Fig. 25).

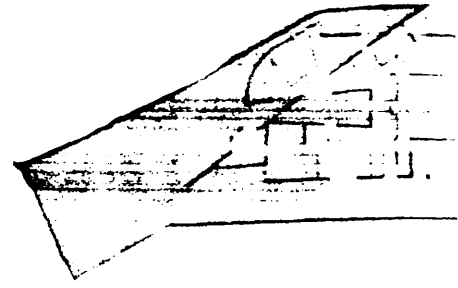
This build-up of visions, the mounting expectations and curiosity, all this described by the association of one form to another, of one level to another, is the greatest evolution of the principle of interpenetration. It defines the unspoken evolution of thought processes and ideas through time. ✓

The principle of the interpenetration of space or the 'explosion of the box' was best exemplified by Theo van Doesburg and the de Stijl movement, who are the direct predecessors to Siza's eloquent transformations.

Theo van Doesburg was the initiator of neo-plastic architecture. It was based on the destruction of masses, rectangular coloured planes and a four-dimensional space time



relationship. He claimed that de Stijl was the outcome of Cubism.(32) Van Doesburg achieved a greater plasticism and a certain organic quality through interpenetration of the ground plan and elevation. The oblique was introduced to denote time, but this remained essentially a two-dimensional approach. The oblique figures strongly in Siza's work; it is partly a compositional element, that is, it forms an element within the two-dimensional composition and then is thrust into three dimensions, and becomes an enclosing element or a screen. An excellent example of this is in the house he built for his brother in Santo Tirso, the Antonio Carlos Siza house (1976-1977) (Fig. 26). The oblique figures as an axis that thrusts itself into the composition. It interrupts the plan form and causes a rethinking of the space to occur. It causes a partial realignment of the spaces, a shifting of their direction, of their intention. It is an indication of the complexity of the site which is contorted and, so, influences the plan configuration. 'Contamination', or the blending of two different tales, takes place.(33) There is no destruction of a theme, only an additional complexity. This is an architecture that is not afraid to conflict, to contradict. It is a visual reflection of the conditions present, and can be extrapolated to describe the complexities of the city.



post modern

The façades reflecting the interior of the house in Santo Tirso portray a subdued image of the orthogonal spaces occurring within. The rear elevation is more explicit in its translation; an indication of the crossing axes is given, and a reflection of the sharply jutting forms is expressed (Fig. 27). This is a cubist tendency, although having little to do with the exuberance of the cubist architects, the most famous one being the Czech architect, Janák; they came into evidence before World War One, primarily in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. They attempted to develop a three-dimensional cubist framework interpreting cubist compositions.

The involvement of architects and Cubism was due primarily to their interaction within the visual arts, and their love of the play possible with planar façades. This, Siza shares with them since the spirit of experimentation is of great importance to him. He also shares the cubist method of work based on spatial exploration which results in architects thinking in volumes, and spaces defined by planes. Plastic form is a cubist notion which then became a premise for the de Stijl movement when there existed, unlike today, a true interaction of the arts. Janák wrote: "The creative process is governed by the geometric conception of forms and that Greek, Gothic and Baroque styles used elements based on prismatic or pyramidal forms and cubist architecture is related to these."(34) They did not concentrate on materials, or on colour, since they thought that simplicity would allow the form to be more apparent. Siza, however, uses colour simply, strongly and effectively, adding to its abstraction.

Duchamp-Villon wrote: "We must penetrate the relation of these objects among themselves, in order to interpret, in lines, planes, and synthetic volumes, which are balanced, in their place, in rhythms analogous to those of the life surrounding us."(35) Much like Duchamp-Villon, Siza treats the façade as a painting: each part of the façade representational, broken surfaces, balance of colour and form, breakdown of massing, dramatization of movement. This further development of the façade as 'painterly composition', the use of the oblique, the dematerialization of the box into volumes, planes and sculptural elements, is the major development from Mendelsohn.

These principles can be seen, amalgamated in a work of extraordinary beauty and vitality, where transparency and sculptural volumes interact to produce a building which incorporates both the premises of de Stijl and Cubism. The example is of the Van Nelle factory in Rotterdam, designed by

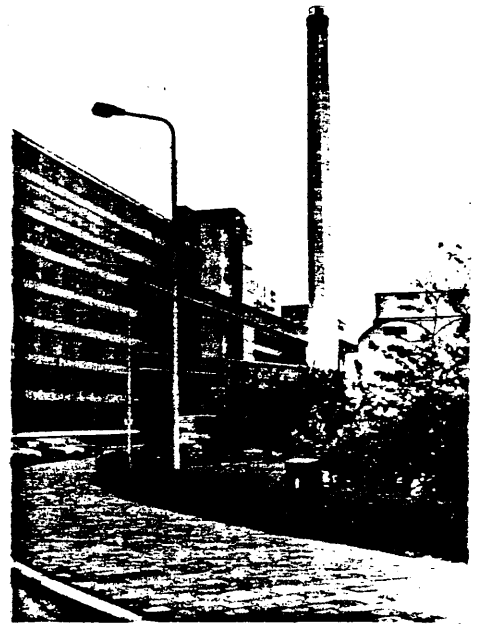
*Siza is a changed man  
not a painter  
He makes an architect  
with his own hands  
not just like Mendelsohn.*



Brinkmann and van der Vlugt, with Mart Stam acting as main designer (Fig. 28). It incorporates principles developed by Mendelsohn and by Le Corbusier. It includes evocative form, expressions of industry, makes clear the concept of productivity, all this achieved by the use of transparency, composition and form. It endows the 'factory type' with poetry, and can be described as a work of art (Fig. 29).



Art, as defined by Benedetto Croce is "intuition" and "a particular form of the pleasurable".(36) He describes art as intuition, and says that "intuition is the undifferentiated unity of the perception of the real and of the simple image of the possible".(37) This is also true of art and, therefore, of architecture. This is the best possible definition to me of the prerequisite of the building as 'art object'. We will see in Part 3 how Siza has endowed the same qualities to the 'bank type'.



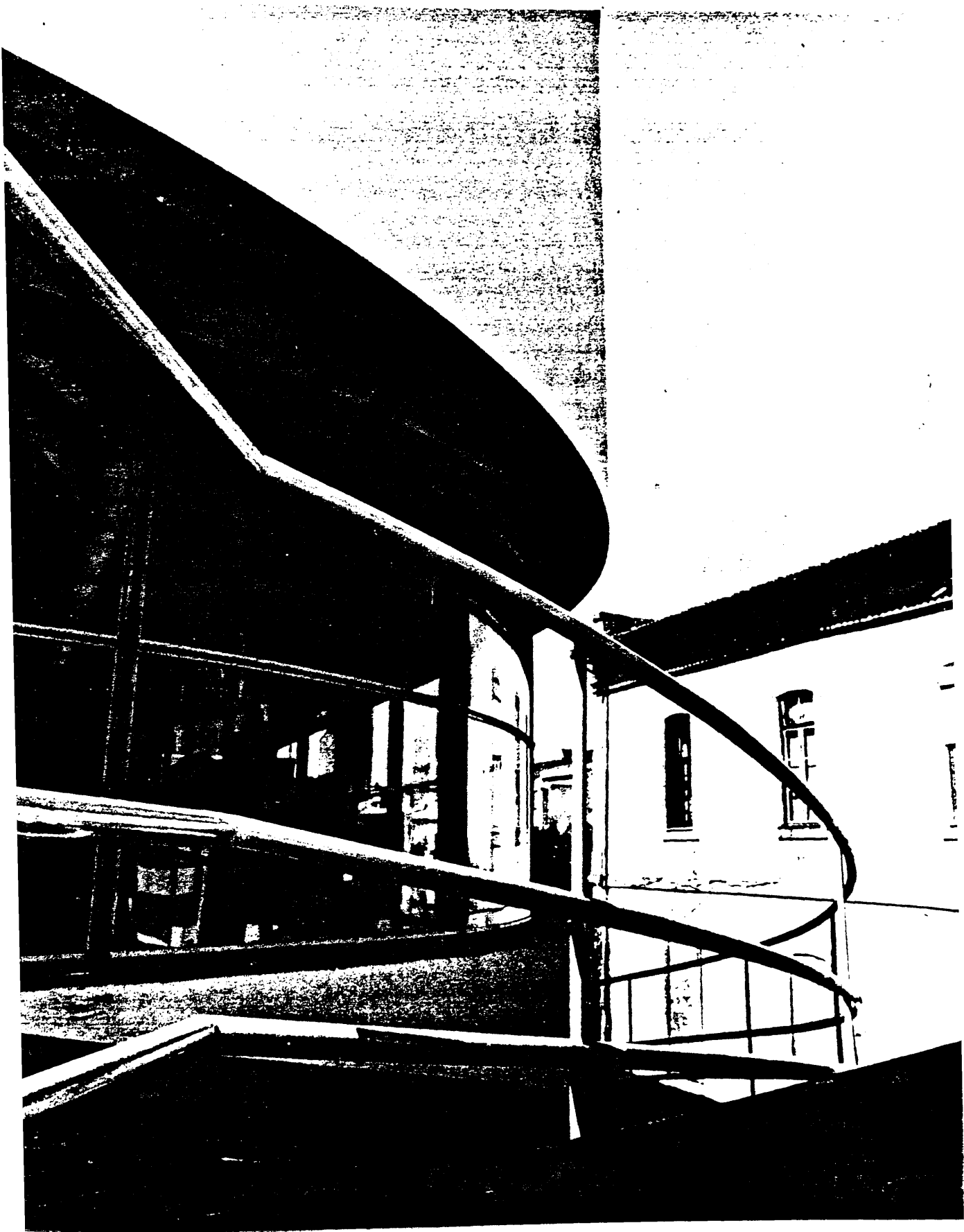
We will end this introductory section with a quote from Gaudet: "Beauty is the splendour of the truth. Art is the means given to a man to produce beauty; art is thus pursuit of beauty in the truth, by the truth. In the arts of imitation, truth is nature: in the arts of creation in architecture most of all, truth is less easily defined; nevertheless for me I would translate it by one word: consciousness. If for the painter and the sculptor truth is in the external world, for us it resides within ourselves."(38)

# Footnotes:

## Part I

1. Colin Rowe, **The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays**, Chapter on 'Character and composition: or Some Vicissitudes of Architectural Vocabulary in the Nineteenth Century', p. 63
2. **Ibid.**
3. **Ibid.**, p. 61
4. **Ibid.**
5. Kenneth Frampton, **Modern Architecture — A Critical History**, p. 19
6. **L' Architecture d'Aujourd'hui No. 181'**
7. Tim and Charlotte Benton, **Form and Function**, p. 97
8. Kenneth Frampton, **Modern Architecture**, p. 14
9. **Ibid.**, pp. 17-18
10. Suzanne S. Frank, **Michel de Klerk 1884-1923, An Architect of the Amsterdam School**, Chapter 1
11. Theodor W. Adorno, 'Notes on Functionalism Today,' **'Oppositions 17'**
12. Kenneth Frampton, **Modern Architecture**, p. 19
13. Bruno Zevi, **The Modern Language of Architecture**, pp. 23-30
14. Kenneth Frampton, **Modern Architecture — A Critical History**, p. 19
15. Tim and Charlotte Benton, **Form and Function**, p. 57
16. **Ibid.**, p. 32
17. Tim and Charlotte Benton, **Form and Function — A Source Book for the History of Architecture and Design 1890-1939**, p. 28

18. Kenneth Frampton, **Modern Architecture**, p. 19
19. Konrad Fiedler, **Aesthetics of Architecture**, pp. 176-180
20. Bruno Zevi, **Erich Mendelsohn**, p. 20
21. S. Frederick Starr, Konstantin Melnikov, '**Lotus International No. 16**'
22. Bruno Zevi, **Erich Mendelsohn**, p. 20
23. **L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui No. 181**
24. Tim and Charlotte Benton, **Form and Function**, p. 97
25. **Ibid.**
26. **Oppositions 17**, Mario Gandelsonas, 'From Structure to Subject: The Formation of an Architectural Language'
27. Joseph Rykwert, **The Necessity of Artifice**, 'Meaning & Building'
28. Herschel B. Chipp, **Theories of Modern Art: A Source book by Artists and Critics**, p. 206
29. Colin Rowe, **The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa**,
30. Essay 'Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal', p. 161
31. **Ibid.**, p. 171
32. Heinrich Wölfflin, **Renaissance and Baroque**, pp. 17-19
33. Joost Baljeu, **Theo van Doesburg**, Chapter I
34. **Oxford Dictionary of Current English**, p. 244
35. Ivan Margolius, **Cubism in Architecture and the Applied Arts**, p. 40
36. **Ibid.**
37. Benedetto Croce, **Art as Intuition**, pp. 88-90
38. **Ibid.**, p. 94
39. Julien Gaudet, **Elements et Theories de l'Architecture**
- 40.



at Vila do Conde

# Portugal — A Selective Retrospective of Portuguese Precedents

“Each design is bound to catch, with the utmost rigour, a precise moment of flittering image in all its shades and the better you can recognize that flittering quality of reality, the clearer your design must arise. It is the more vulnerable as it is true.” \*

*Look at his sketches (flitter)*

\* Alvaro Siza Porto, May 1979

Architecture and Urbanism (A&U)

1980:12 No. 123

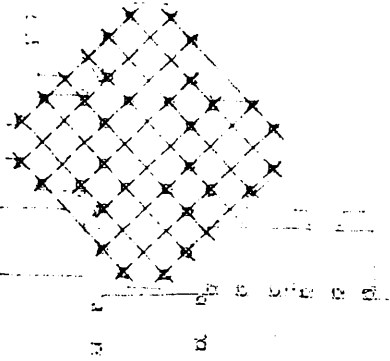
Very little is available on the architecture of Portugal or on its history, that is in English; it is usually portrayed as being engulfed within the Iberian Peninsula with very little identity of its own. It is, however, a country rich in local traditions, and architectural influences ranging from northern European, Spanish, indigenous and colonial.

In the limited space of time available to this study, it would be impossible to describe all of Portugal's architectural styles, so I have concentrated specifically on the historical period which I found to offer the most interesting parallels to Siza's work, or most pertinent to the forms and the imagery he creates.

This chapter will also examine the development of the 'modern', underlining the specific cultural and political difficulties Portugal faced in breaking away from traditionalism and nationalism. This is important in order to have a better understanding or feeling for the particular climate in which Siza, like many other architects of the period, was forced to evolve. It will also make clearer his particular and individual design sensibilities, and becomes yet another factor influencing his architecture.

I will begin by looking at the period spanning between 1521-1706, which to me forms an intriguing precedent to both Siza's architecture and the development of the modern and acts as a precedent to the development of the modern movement in Portugal. The so-called 'plain' architecture of this era reflected the change in the economy of the country, suggesting that perhaps 'style' reacts to changing conditions, whether economic or political. This will be even more apparent when discussing the twentieth century in Portugal, when 'style' was a direct reflection of political and social conditions.

The 'Estilo Desornamentado' or 'plain' architecture was a reaction to the excesses of the highly decorated Manueline

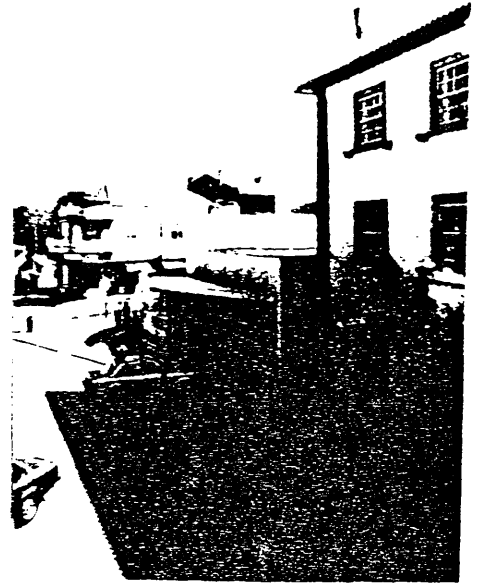


style which occurred after the extravagances of Manuel I. It resulted in harmonic proportioning and in clearer and more rational façades, encouraged by a return to basic architectural principles undertaken under the reign of John III. Siza's architecture also shares this simplification of exterior/interior but, like the so-called 'plain' style, the volumetric play is complex. The 'plain' style may have been influenced by Italian military architecture, enriched by both northern European influences and by the Portuguese vernacular. (1) It can be seen as a vernacular reflecting the various regions and all their eccentricities, to include form, planning and some curious elevational treatment. It occurred a full decade earlier than in Spain, and differed from its Spanish counterpart by the absence of academic rules and by its non-insistence on pre-determined models. It remained in this simplified form until about 1675.

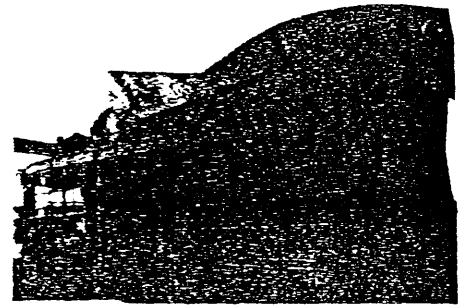
When examining this kind of historical parallel, many questions are brought to mind. Is there a possibility of a continuation of past historical traditions or of a national architecture, not an obvious one perhaps but rather a predilection for a particular form or planning feature? Is there a specifically Portuguese way of thinking about architecture? These are of relevance when comparing this plain architectural tradition to Siza's work; in his perhaps unconscious understanding of national building traditions and an innate understanding of his history, which makes itself visible in his adoption of certain elements and principles. In Siza's case a fascination for form is perhaps the clearest of parallels: for complex forms enclosed by an abstracted, simplified envelope; for the almost barrier-like walls which form the enclosure; for the white-washed exterior; and for the use of building as introverted object.

It is not unusual for an architect's work to be related in some way to a particular architectural tradition or period, for certain principles do transcend time, as we have seen in Part I.

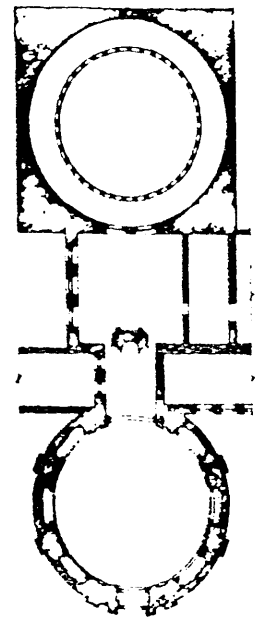
The question that comes to mind is, what role does nationalism play in determining which principles are adopted, if it has a role to play at all? They may be influenced by climate, by a national awareness of the historical and political past which has affected the populace, and by particular social concerns. These are factors that greatly influenced the birth and development of the modern movement in Portugal, which will appear to be a different movement since it was not based on the same ideology as its European counterpart. A few historical examples taken from the 'plain' architectural period will be described, the first being the Bom Jesus de Valverde (Fig. 30).



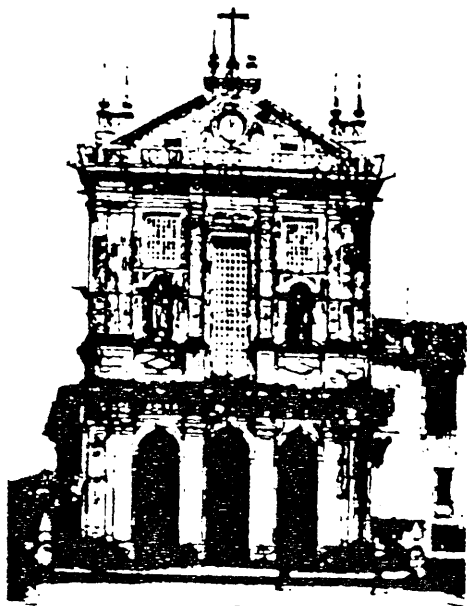
The Bom Jesus de Valverde (1550-1560), west of Evora (south-east of Lisbon), was a Capuchin monastery although it now houses a state school of agriculture. This tiny church, whose largest dimension is 21 feet, makes up for the restricted plan area by the ingenuity of its design. The volume consists of five octagons which, when seen diagonally, form a square in plan. The diagonals of the square form the axes of the church (Fig. 31). This highly complex little volume exploits the density and compactness of the site without confusion. Each form is seen as an entity and articulated as such (Fig. 32). The building is multi-directional; its references to the environment are numerous.



Siza's two banks also dispose themselves to address the surroundings, although this is achieved by different means: by not articulating each form to direct itself but more abstractly using the curved paths of the façade (Fig. 33); by a certain transparency of the façade which allows the viewer to extrapolate the internal elements or clues into a direction. This is particularly evident in the bank at Oliveira de Axeméis, where a subtle re-direction of the forms occurs at roof level (Fig. 34). The articulation of forms, when looking at the







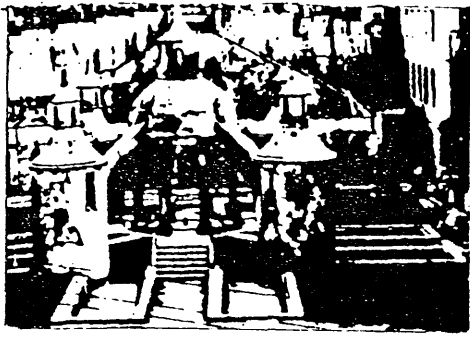
examples from the two eras, although different can be seen to be an evolution from the more baroque style composition, as seen in the Bom Jesus de Valverde, to Siza's more abstract method. The Bom Jesus de Valverde is more obvious and the octagons are articulated as such. No attempt has been made to abstract them. This is more a question of the historical times in which each was created. Siza abstracts his forms by masking their complexity, a reflection, possibly, of the more uncertain century in which we live. Only a suggestion of the enclosed spaces can be detected; hence the subdued character of the banks, very different from the more obviously expressive historical example.

The Serra do Pilar church at Vila Nova de Gaia, across the river Douro from Porto, is a very novel example from the past (Fig. 35). Its plan is exceptional, involving a 'trapped' cylindrical volume enclosed in a square, and a free spherical volume. The proportionality of the scheme deviated substantially from the Italian modes. Although Palladian references are noticeable, either in elevation or in the details chosen, they were unconventionally referred to. They rarely followed academic rules; more usually they were experiments, as in this example, particularly in the curious planning and in the volumetric idioms chosen. Again here, both the two-dimensional and volumetric composition of the older historical example is more obvious, more direct, when compared to Siza's banks at either Vila do Conde or Oliveira de Azeméis, but the same experimentation of form and rules of composition exist in the examples from both eras. The same questioning attitude prevails, only the results are different.

Other interesting distortions occur in the Grijo, at Salvador, which shows an elongation of the proportioning systems, very noticeable in the exaggerated height of the building (Fig. 36).

The side elevation is compositionally abstract; the plain white-washed façade is pierced by six perfectly aligned windows, none of which is square, at the apex of which is a circular window; the whole seemingly reflecting the pitch of the roof (Fig. 37). The disposition and proportion of the windows in the upper storey of the main church elevation refers us forward, to the twenties or thirties. The fenestration continues the sensation of a thrusting upwards begun by the arcaded ground floor. The main and side façades differ in age by a century; the main one dates from around 1575 and the side elevation, from approximately 1650. They show marked differences: the beautifully balanced composition of the main elevation indicates influences from northern Europe, and the side displays a very clear and almost abstract façade, almost devoid of all ornamentation. A feature prevalent during the sixteenth century was a fascination for wall as sculptural element, for its potential as a membrane, screen, barrier or spatial element, as well as for its possibility to be transformed. George Kubler isolated these first experiments as having begun between 1530-1540.(2) He also isolated a Portuguese penchant for small, perfect geometrical forms dating from the same time. Gonçalo Byrne, a Portuguese architect, isolated these same features in his discussion of the many possibilities open to Portuguese architects of this present generation. He explained how some architecture used the traditional elements of wall, arch, membrane, synthesising these into a monument, and supposing identification via a collective memory.(3) Siza uses these traditional elements in a novel way. The wall becomes a statement, a physical pause to the space beyond. Free-standing elements such as stairs are used, linking one open and dynamic space to another. The elements are not synthesized but mark both a visual as well as a physical interchange.

Another example of this predilection for form can be seen in



the Manga cloister fountain in Coimbra, which displays a novel grouping of objects, each relating to the other (Fig. 38).

Siza's bank at Vila do Conde is a perfect object for comparison since it is also a clear geometrical object, enclosed upon itself, a complete environment. The enclosing wall becomes transformed from barrier to transparent screen. A rich layering occurs which also has its precedent in this period.



In the example of the Torralva cloister at Tomar, three principle layers are visible representing different historical periods: the first being a layer of coupled columns, a middle layer behind, and a third forming the cloister walk. Very intricate cells form part of this final layer, giving it a sense of inhabitation. Each wall layer appears to be an environment in itself, inner and outer walls relating to each other in complex configurations and portraying different systems, the rich façade acting as a frontispiece to a backdrop of earlier work. Siza's housing terraces for the Bouça Residents Housing Association shows a similar relationship to the historical fabric, but not as explicitly (Fig. 39). Here the relationship is strictly visual; the historical past still in evidence, but only as a pictorial outline.

From this rich period already displaying characteristics of the 'modern' we will transcend time, to a period which occurred over three hundred years later, in order to link up with the various pioneers of the twentieth century modern movement. The breakthrough into the new modern era occurred painfully, held back as it was by successive right wing governments who favoured the development of a national Portuguese architecture, one based on an architecture that was backward-looking, a very conservative and reactionary attitude. The architects were faced with an extended list of barriers resisting the development of the 'modern' which so excited them: political

and social concerns, and a small and insufficient body of thought with which to analyse and consider the ideology behind the birth of the twentieth century modern movement in Europe. José Augusto França wrote that the rigours of the International Style corresponded to a mentality that the Portuguese society could not afford, or assume in their hesitant urban life, too afraid of the cultural and social dangers that modernity inspired.(4)

The period describing the years of 1910-1926 corresponded to experimentation and a more democratic rule; architects not being very sure of the social or political ideologies associated with modernism, but enthusiastic in their attempt to discover and develop the language. The years between 1925-1940 were also anti-state (see next paragraph) and were described by França as the 'golden age' since it corresponded to a period of time when some very interesting work was accomplished, and a relative freedom of design was present. He suggested that it was also due to the lack of a coherent control in the various cultural sectors.(5) Many architects contributed to this 'golden age': Cassiano Branco designed a grand theatre/cinema complex in the years 1930-1931 which included an imposing façade; very cubistic in its composition and an imaginative volumetric play; and Jorge Segurado designed one of the most sophisticated buildings of the period, one that involved a play of orthogonal and cylindrical volumes.

The years between 1930-1940 saw the defense of the modern movement, because it was seen as a form of opposition to a regime trying to impose an architecture based on Mussolini's Italy. A significant and equally alarming change occurred in 1940, with the inauguration of an exhibition glorifying the work of the architects of the Third Reich. The governmental bodies were much impressed with this show of nationalism and

*but Muro was a substitute  
of Modernism (Terraço)*

strength. These ideas of 'empire' and 'tradition' and 'nationalism' spearheaded the principles enforced on architects by the regime. The gravity of this situation is made obvious by this quote: "We find ourselves in a period where one must opt; either the architect accepts the society as it is organized and administrated responding via his training and his profession as a competent technician, to what is asked of him, or the architect does not accept, and risking the death of architecture itself, fights for new directions for both professional participation and intervention."(6)

Added to this grave injustice of frightening proportions was an exhibition on Portugal's past architectural heritage, glorifying, it, and denouncing what was termed as pompous academicism. The two significant events managed to reverse the work and, to some degree, the intentions of the pioneering generation. Many were forced to change their attitude in order to survive. However many, such as Keil do Amarel, attacked; he, specifically by writing very lucid articles against both the political regime in Portugal and the German imperial architecture. He was closely followed by students of The Beaux Arts school in Porto, headed by Carlos Ramos, an architect very much in touch with the modern movement. They were aided by the Neo-realist and Surrealist painters, a true union of the arts.

The most important and optimistic note for the development of the modern occurred via the congress of 1948. It was the first congress to demand total freedom of expression from the ruling government. It was composed of two factions: the I.C.A.T., or the 'cultural, artistic and technical initiatives', and the O.D.A.M., which was the 'organization of modern architects'. The first group was formed in 1946, and consisted of young architects grouped around Keil do Amarel. These had very clearly distinguished themselves from the regime by their

*Why not mention  
subsequent work*

practices and ideology. They were against the nationalist stamp, which they considered to be inappropriate. They called for theories that formed the rationalist ideology of the thirties, including the theories of Le Corbusier. They organized debates which allowed architects for the first time to discuss architecture. The magazine 'Arquitectura' published their theories. The second group proposed theories of some difference and was composed exclusively of architects from Porto. They wanted a re-evaluation of the profession, a link with the plastic arts, an efficient control of amateurism in architecture, and the acceptance of modernism. It was form and the stylistic language that interested them the most. Thus, the congress of 1948 produced some very important principles: a denial of the nationalistic models, a will to plan both individual housing as well as urban planning, a priority to be given to social housing, the promotion of non-speculation, a greater social conscience, industrialization, the reform of architectural education, as well as the creation of an organizational body to protect the architect from the administration.

The school at Porto playing a very important role; it was still under Carlos Ramos, where actual theory and ideology was discussed, very much in keeping with the 'spirit' in which the modern movement was first initiated. There was a drifting of architects to the Porto school since Lisbon still remained under the powers of the local administration. Porto became the battleground for the resurrected 'modern'.

Gonçalo Byrne, a Portuguese architect, makes clear Portugal's actual position vis à vis the modern movement. "Portugal deviated from what was designated by the theories and work of the European 'moderns' by a questioning of the orthodox vocabulary, in practicing 'composition' in terms of articulating significant programming elements in terms of site." (7) He also

wrote that to demystify architecture from the concept of the 'autonomous machine' is only possible via lucid action, in order to de-sanitize the architectural language.(8)

According to Gonçalo Byrne, two tendencies dominated the architecture of Portugal in the 1960's. The first was of Italian origin, having organic and rational tendencies. This is more apparent in the social housing types. The second is associated with touristic development and, in terms of language, has a definite mediterranean 'folkloric' tendency, and an anglo-saxon form of functionalism tending towards 'brutalism', as well as to the 'International Style'.(9)

The most innovative work done during the 1950-1960's was Fernando Tavora's work, and Siza's from 1954, with his housing at Matohinsos. The architects from this generation onwards understood the full impact and meaning of the modern movement, questioned its language and its principles, much in the same way that pioneers in the 'spirit of the modern' had done. They broke with what they thought were arbitrary codes, and developed their own, based on personal biases of austerity and purity. This is an attitude that we see prevalent in Siza. He developed his own personal language based on his generation of austerity and purity of form. Other architects of his generation had different tendencies; for example, a suspicion of the 'picturesque', or a penchant for composition using minimalist forms, thus tending towards the architecture of the 1920's which was eliminated under the military dictatorship of Salazar. Victor Figueiredo, for example, was interested in the non-functional aspect of what he called 'superfluous space'.(10) These manipulations include 'composition' and the use of references. Byrne also points out how architecture became, in other examples, its own site, underplaying its context, resulting in the building becoming the 'seed' from which other architecture springs.(11)

Certain projects discovered, and experimented with, these principles, having transformed the existing principles of the 'modern' to include these subtleties. Some, like Siza, use only certain signs, and visual sequences creating new relationships between the historical and the present, either in terms of tension, opposition, or recuperation of certain constants such as colour or texture.

As seen with Siza and our diversion into the past of the 'plain' architecture period, the 'citadel' forms an interesting parallel to a Portuguese way of thinking about architecture; that is, architecture as an island of safety, as an object turned inward to protect itself. This is no great wonder when one considers the hostile times which the country and its people had to survive. It is no surprise then that an extreme sensitivity of design occurred, to counterbalance the years of artistic starvation, a freedom we are fortunate to have.



# Footnotes:

## Part 2

1. George Kubler, **Portuguese Plain Architecture: Between Spices and Diamonds**, p.10
2. George Kubler, **Portuguese Plain Architecture: Between Spices and Diamonds**, p. 7
3. **L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, No. 185**, Gonçalo Byrne, 'Quelques Premices pour une architecture nouvelle', p. 33
4. **Ibid.**, p. 5
5. **Ibid.**, José Augusto França, 'Le Fascisme Pur et Dur',
6. **Ibid.**, Carlos Duarte, 'L'Ouverture Néo-Capitaliste 1961-1974', p. 23
7. **Ibid.**, Gonçalo Byrne, 'Quelques Prémices', p. 32
8. **Ibid.**
9. **Ibid.**
10. **Ibid.**
11. **Ibid.**, p. 33



# Part 3

## The Tale of Two Banks

**“Out of contrast Harmony alone can come; out of despair the finale’s mystical embracing of the adagio. The binding of life with its form. Law of tension in matter of spirit.” \***

\* Erich Mendelsohn 1915

Erich Mendelsohn by Arnold Witteck

This section will describe in particular the two banks: the Oliveira de Azémeis bank, south-east of Lisbon, and the Vila do Conde bank, north of Porto. These examples of Siza's work have been isolated, not because one or the other is more interesting comparatively speaking, but because the two represent completed examples of his mature work in Portugal. (1)

Kenneth Frampton describes these times in which we live in terms of a series of definitions, not finite and not exclusive, but ranging from tendencies where aspects are strongly or not so strongly differentiated: Productivism, known more colloquially as Hi-Tech; Populism, known as Post-Modernism, Structuralism, which has brutalist tendencies, the cellular units most often implying a rigid concrete structure; and Rationalism, which he differentiates from the International Style by the inclusion of historical references or regional influences.(2)

Loosely included in these differentiations is 'Regionalism'. This is a difficult category since it is described by Frampton as being specific to an area, to a country. "The term 'regional' is not intended to denote the vernacular, as this was once spontaneously produced by the combined interaction of climate, culture, and craft, but rather to identify those regional 'schools' whose aim have been to represent and serve particular constituencies."(3)

Frampton includes Siza, as well as the Catalan Revival group including Oriol Bohigas, J.A. Coderch, the Mexican architect Luis Barragán, the Swiss architect Botta, and many others in this section. (4) To me this category seems to imply an almost indiscriminate acceptance of the 'region' or 'country' as model and, thus, a 'particularized' architecture. Yet, having undergone such difficult conditions in Portuguese history in the recent past, it would be difficult to accept these implications in their case.

We have seen how Portuguese architects had a particular struggle: in the re-development of a new language and, compounded with this, in a specific struggle against the nationalism and the traditionalism of the powers concerned. Although Frampton is correct in assuming the architecture thus produced will be more sensitive to the particular region in which it is situated, this does not imply exclusivity. Portuguese architects indeed developed their own personal language, and use of specific codes and references because of their particular political and social context, but this language can be applied to deal with all architectural situations since it is a transformation of the principles of the 'modern', which are universal. To these, certain historical principles are sometimes adopted, again after transformation. The resulting architecture then displays a certain communality in terms of character, as well as similarities to the native architecture.

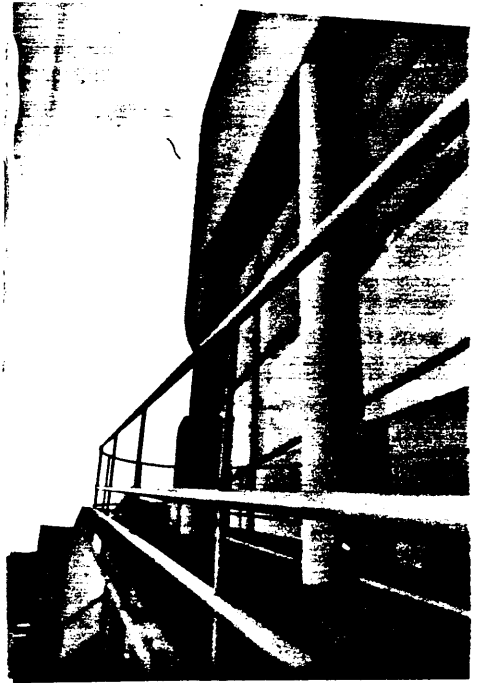
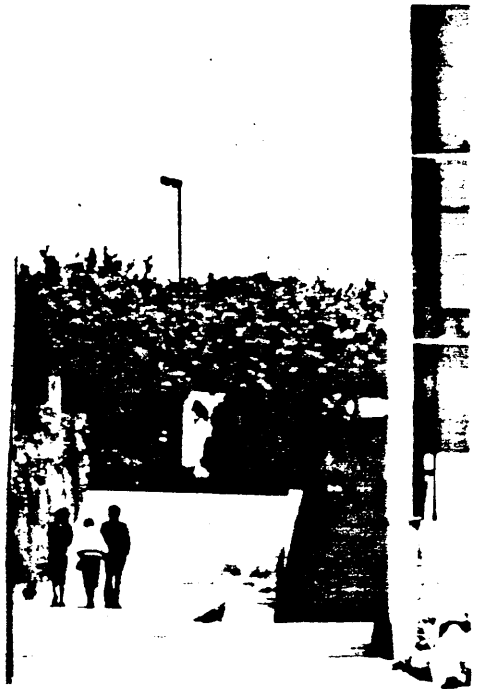
In Siza's case, this would suggest an architecture only relevant in Portugal; yet, if this were true for example, we would find an almost unquestioning acceptance of his architecture rather than the opposition that his bank at Vila do Conde received. His architecture is not specific to the region; as he said, it evolves when many considerations have been taken, similar to Aalto's technique.<sup>(5)</sup> It is a personalized response, with references sometimes present but not obvious.

On the question of historical influences, Siza has this to say: "For us (here he is referring to the architectural profession) what is important is the understanding of our country, the diverse cultures, and relationships between the lives of the people and their environment. It is information, useful knowledge, very important but nothing more. It is not a formal model. I do not accept the influence of traditional architecture as a formal model, but as an experience in its long adaptation to the environment also reflecting the

transformations of this relationship. In this way it interests me. To understand the relationships between a way of life and architecture is very useful, not for proposing the organization of space, but to understand the real problems of society."(6)

Much like the architects of his generation in Portugal, Siza developed in relative isolation, with no body of thought to fall back upon which was specific to the problems inherent in his society. This is explained by Siza himself when describing the impossibility of developing a 'theoretical' model: "The recent experience in Portugal (here he is referring to the revolution which occurred on the 25th of April, 1974) plunged us into practical work, lacking a certain sureness in terms of a theoretical viewpoint. A theoretical support is required for practical work."(7)

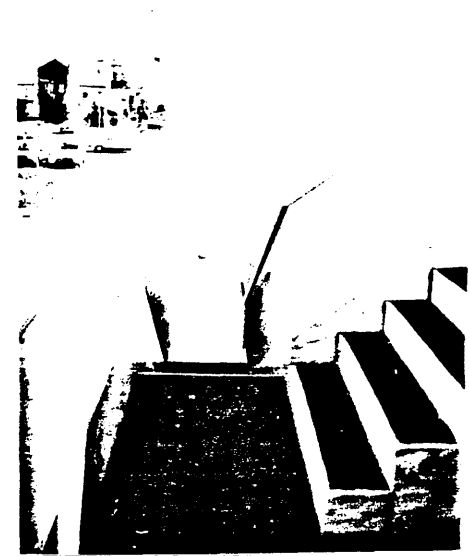
Operation S.A.A.L. (Servicio de Apoyo Ambulatorio Local) was set up in August of 1974, under Nuno Portas, who was then Secretary of State for housing and urbanism. It was a practical operation that developed principally in Lisbon and Porto, and involved the renewal of degraded areas, via housing associations composed of the existing residents, and technical brigades of architects, students, lawyers, sociologists etc. It was concerned mainly with inner city areas. Siza wrote: "If one works on a concrete reality, there are very complex forces of transformation in which one participates, and one cannot fix an image onto this moment in transformation. Everything escapes a little. When one produces a concrete work, there is a certain time for this work, but the transformation in progress does not halt, it continues; I am sensitive to the moment that follows. I participate in this transformation. I am a part of it, I am never far. Therefore one needs a moment to make a point. The problem is that when one is plunged into practical work there remains little time to define the point."(8) (Here he is referring to Rossi, who developed a definite theory of the city,





and the transformations inherent in it and, therefore, had previous knowledge of the point.) This is perhaps a part of the reason why Siza's work retains an introverted quality, closed upon itself although subtly referring to the exterior, much like his working theory which does not deal consciously with a body of thought, a school of ideas, but only with the project in question. Both banks are examples of this philosophy. I will begin with the Vila do Conde bank.

The bank at Vila do Conde responds to the public square, not in acceptance but in inference. The public square is raised, thus accentuating its public quality. An outside café makes its function more obvious. Steps lead up to the weekly market: a Friday market attracting people from many of the surrounding areas. The scenario is set (**Fig. 40**). The building must somehow react to this set, and it does so by attempting to be inobtrusive, by playing down its role in the architectural scene, by masking itself; it is careful not to project a strong image, but it fails. It fails because all was too carefully considered; both because of the strictness of its disposition and because it is mysterious in its image, it attracts (**Fig. 41**). It attempts to be introverted in its appearance but, by its clear and tranquil presence, it stirs. It evokes images although it is simple and this is because it is pure form: like sculpture, it asks to be touched; it evokes images of the sea: it beckons. It causes reactions because all this is expressed abstractly and, therefore, it is said not to be part of the village square; it is not part of the buildings that silently face the activity; it questions, and responds. The white-washed walls curve round to the entrance which is not in evidence, but which occurs on the periphery of the building. It creates an impact because, despite the closeness of the site, it creates a clearing for itself — its own square; defying the other but not excluding it. The building creates its own film set; it involves a ceremonious route which is not for particular persons, but for manager and staff alike

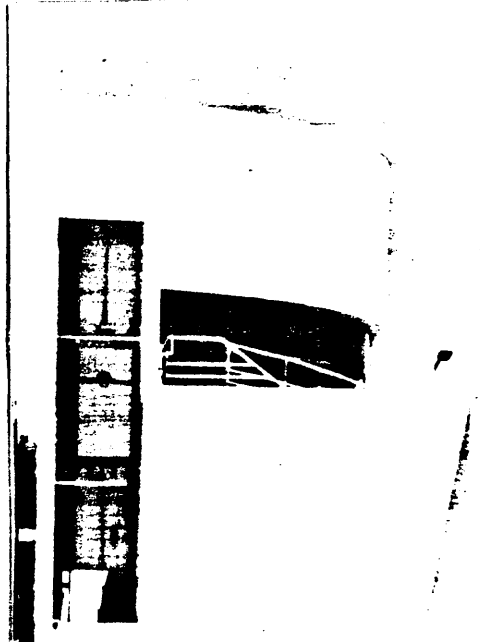
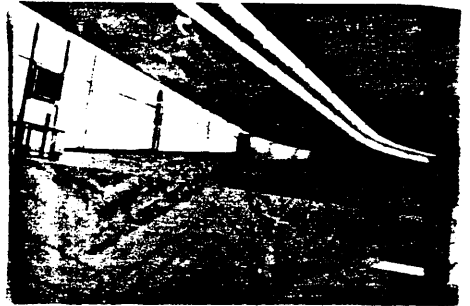
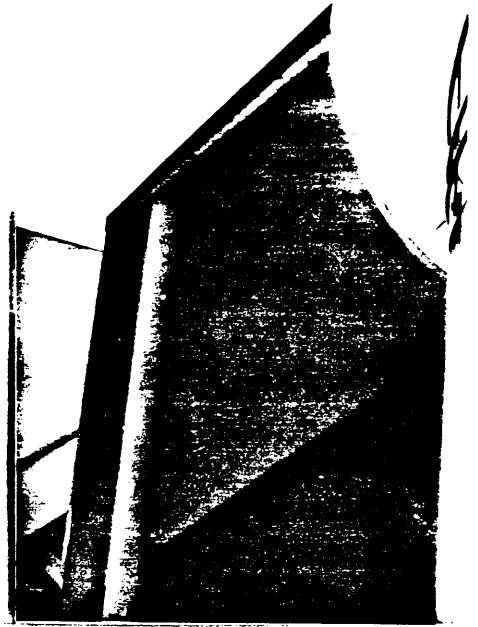


(Fig. 42); it allows them to pass directly from street level via a ramp to office level. It also involves an intricate interior and articulated rear portion, with a secluded patio and garden area (Fig. 43). The space in which these activities are housed is tight, rendering parts of the planning awkward, because much was made of the site despite its limitations (Fig. 44).

Given such a bank, we are forced to ask questions of architecture: can a building perform such different roles; how does one determine criteria to establish the failure or the success of such a building? One asks of this building: does it perform as a bank; is it important for it to be recognizable as such? Technically, this is easy to achieve; one questions bankers and workers as to the adequacy of the planning but, as to the form, who and what can determine the appropriateness of this? Is it important for a building to have a bank-like appearance and, if so, what is that appearance?

This then leads us to the difficulties of 'type'. It has been said of modern architecture that it destroyed the richness of typology by almost defacing buildings, but this must be queried because, in the past, architects were able to produce types with a greater facility, aided as they were by 'style'; for example 'public' buildings were designed for example in the gothic style to denote importance or grandness. 'Style' decorated the problem which now, with none to fall back on, with no rules to follow, has been denuded.

Perhaps the problem of type can be tackled using form and the transparency of form as an indication. In this way we can say that Siza has succeeded, since he has proposed form as a container for the functions of banking: a highly modulated receptacle which allows us to view part of the transactions. Yet a difficult decision had to be made in terms of the public face of the building which opposes the central issue of a bank:







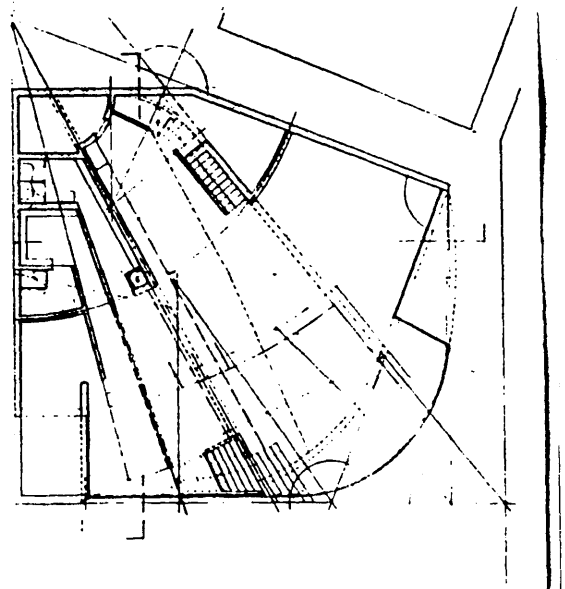
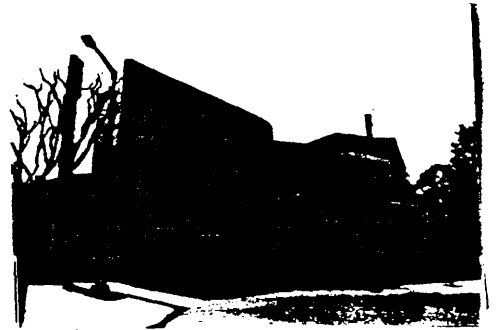
namely, its security function (**Fig. 45**). Although directly facing the most public aspect of the town it could not appear to suggest openness yet nor could it discourage its public. The resultant façade suggests both an openness and a closed aspect, carefully integrated. The rear elevation is equally poetic in its partial indication of internal machinery (**Fig. 46**). The building is introverted, closed within its own environment.

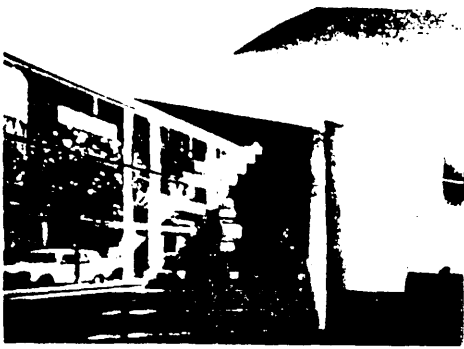
There are three planes of activity: the lower ground floor has banking facilities as well as the safe, storage, and a small coffee space; the ground floor has the main banking facilities; and with stairs leading up to the first floor where further banking facilities are located, as well as the manager's office (**Fig. 47**). Only a discrete screen separates the manager's office from the bank floor, which is pierced by a circular window (**Fig. 48**). The atria space is universal, linking both the public and the private functionings of the bank.

When considering this plan composition, does it refer to a 'bank type', or can only form suggest 'type'? Aldo Rossi too discusses the problem of 'type'. He observes that some forms are irrespective of function and that the 'individuality' of the building is determined by form.<sup>(9)</sup> Of 'type', he wrote: "I would define the concept of 'type' as something that is permanent and complex, a logical principle that is prior to form and that constitutes it."<sup>(10)</sup> This suggests that it is not repeatable, and that it involves no imitation since it is a structuring principle, a rule. All architects presumably create their own types, much as Siza has. 'Type' can, therefore, be seen as an individual architect's collection of specific rules. Siza's rules can be seen as: a combination of an atrium space, an isolation of certain elements as sculptural objects, such as the stairs or the bank counter, and an increasing as well as a diminishment of transparency in the enveloping exterior wall (**Fig. 49**). Again, Rossi writes: "Ultimately we can say that

'type' is the very idea of architecture, that which is closest to its essence. In spite of changes, it has always imposed itself on the 'feelings' and 'reason' as the principle of architecture of the city."(1) One can extrapolate from the image projected by both banks, and say that it can be seen as a description of Siza's philosophy, which can be characterized as humanistic. I use this term as it best explains Siza's attitude to both his clients (wherever possible) and the community at large. He attempts to design according to their needs, developing a design philosophy that encompasses these, as well as his predilection for experimentation and his respect for context.

The second example is the Oliveira de Azeméis bank is south-east of Porto, in a small historical town. The bank itself is unashamedly modern, but it directs itself via its semi-circular trajectory, to the village square (Fig. 50). It becomes the informal corner, in contrast to its seventeenth century neighbours which consist of the Palace of Justice and a classical building of approximately the same era directly abutting it. The different heights of the bank are in evidence, corresponding to the other buildings in the square, entering into conversation with them but never mimicking them. The massing is seen to be a reflection of the multi-faceted directions and the complexity of multiple viewpoints possible in a corner site, and of the seemingly excited radiating lines, of which the internal organization is a part (Fig. 51). These are the result of the projection lines which meet, and cross, in conversation with their context. No lines are unfinished; none are confusing, as each becomes either a trajectory or a visual path. Internally the lines taken up by the wall wrap themselves around peripheral private functions and so contain them. The lines then diminish in their ferocity and containment as one moves upward through the building to almost leave at roof level via the volumes, directly addressing certain buildings.





Both bank buildings share Siza's individual system of seeming to collect the internal functions by the curvilinear sweep of the exterior wall. Looking at the internal arrangement of the bank at Oliveira de Azeméis, there is a greater definition of public/private than the bank at Vila do Conde. A visual direction is immediately perceived; a curvilinear trajectory is marked from the entrance. From the counter, the principal point of address, where the initial public/private interaction takes place, a clear delineation of route and function and a discreet layering of activity is seen. Articulated spaces occur on the periphery of the form. Interpenetration of the spaces is achieved by the partial openness of the subsequent floors. A stepping back of the upper levels allows for a constant visual exchange of the spaces, with the sky the final link at the upper level (Fig. 52). Thus the progression is complete; from 'closure' to partial openness on the ground floor through to the complete visual openness of the sky.

These are the hints that have been given by the façade which remains guarded, oscillating between opacity where the private functions are carried out to transparency of partial viewing and internal layering, and back to opacity at the periphery, thus achieving a circle of transition. Written on the façade in two dimensions is the three-dimensional experience of the interior, a transfer of perceptions. Two and three dimensions interplay, not in replica but in 'duality'. The façade offers no great contradictions to the essence of the building, but only to the spatial interplay by its quiet response. This is, then, the hybrid in evidence (Fig. 53).

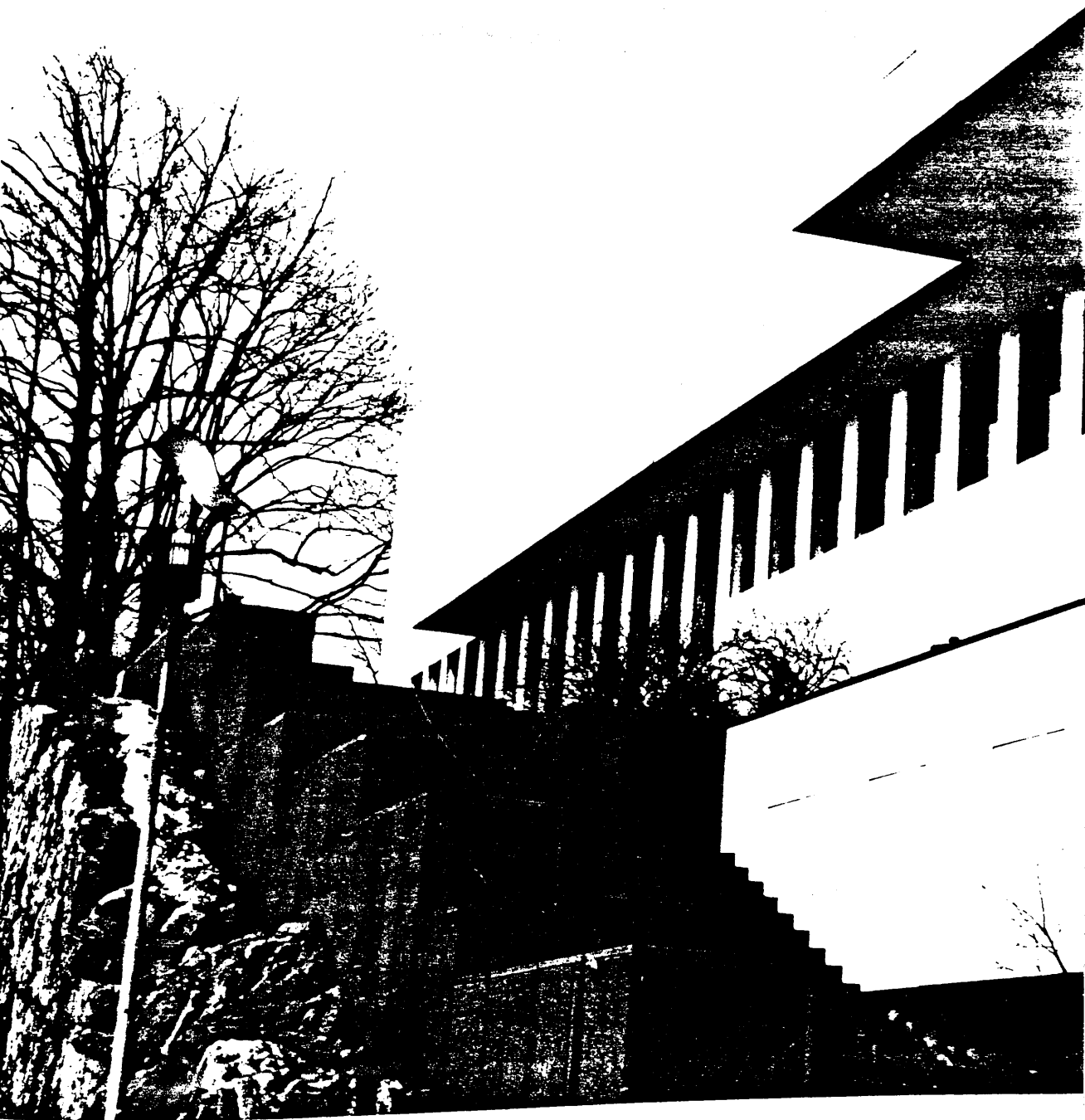
This is very much a concept of de Stijl, in the acceptance and understanding of 'dualities' inherent within architecture. These consist of two extremes, as portrayed in Siza's banks. For Theo van Doesburg and de Stijl, art, and therefore architecture, consisted of these two extremes, be they nature's spirit,

vertical/horizontal or, as in Siza's case, external tranquility/ internal excitement, as well as a two-dimensional reductive envelope/three-dimensional plasticity. Harmony predominates with the equilibrium of the two. According to van Doesburg, this harmony does not describe an individual art, but a national art, which has been faced with these dualities since the beginning of time. Naturally this harmony, which exists in both these examples, is achieved through struggle, though a creative struggle, for this struggle is creativity. The artist is in perpetual struggle with his inner creative self and the environment. De Stijl believed that these dualities could not be solved either by intellect or emotion, but only through plastic means; that is, colour in painting, volume in sculpture, pure sound in music and space in architecture.(12)

# Footnotes: Part 3

*also in p. 100-101*

1. Since this thesis, the Duarte house at Ovar has been completed, the exterior of which is illustrated in the accompanying film "Siza, in Space, Time and Technicolour." His housing scheme at Évora, is also under construction.
2. Kenneth Frampton, **Architecture and the Critical Present** p. 63.
3. Kenneth Frampton, **Modern Architecture**, p. 61
4. **Ibid.** p. 73
5. **L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui**, No. 211, October 1980, p. 2
6. **L'Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité**, September 1977, pp. 33-34
7. **Ibid.**, p. 35
8. **Ibid.**
9. Aldo Rossi, **Architecture of the City**, p. 29
10. **Ibid.**, p. 40
11. **Ibid.**, p. 41
12. Joost Baljeu, **Theo van Doesburg**, p. 120



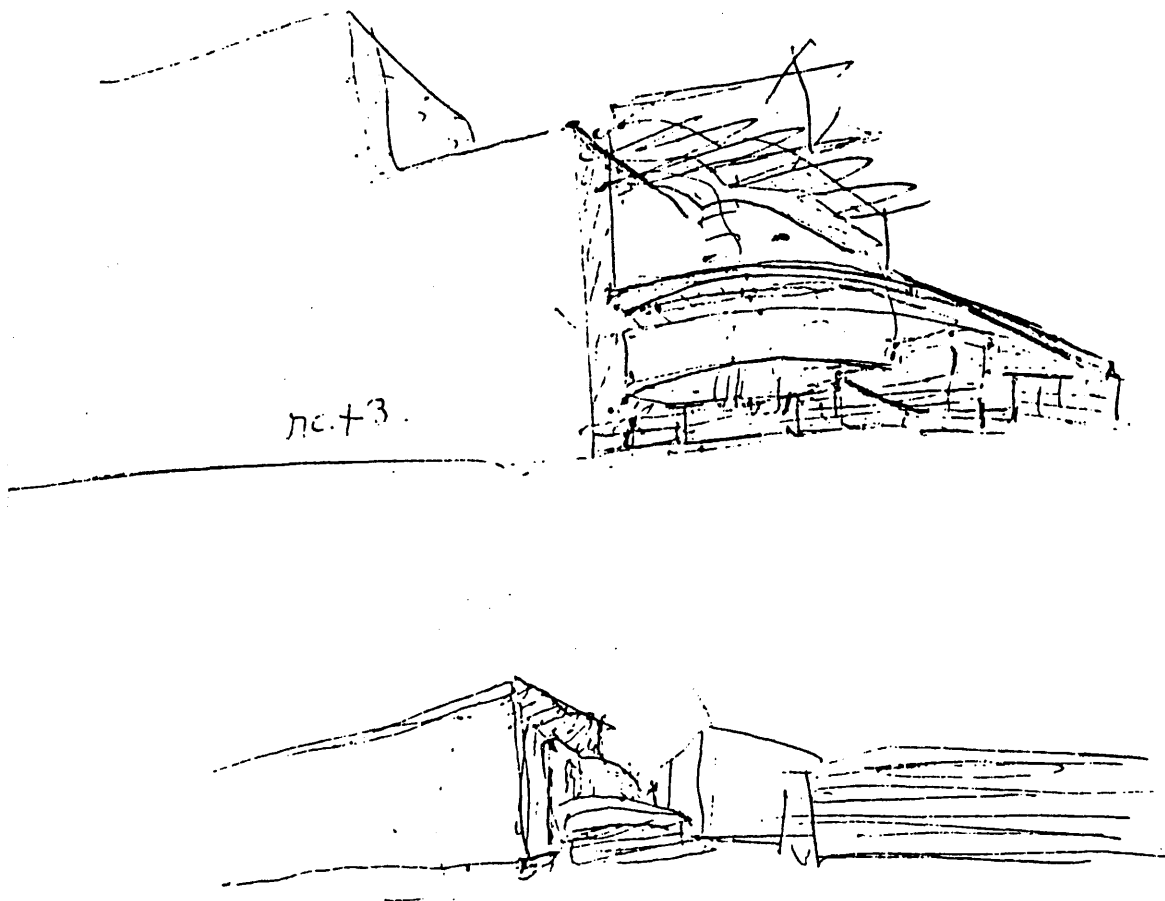
inlandia Hall, Helsinki

Part

# 4

## The Case of Two Architects, Two Generations and Two Countries: Aalto and Siza

"Toute oeuvre (d'art) qui n'est pas vehicule volontaire  
ou involontaire d'aveux est du luxe. Or le luxe est  
pire qu'immoral, il ennue!" \*



\* Jean Cocteau "Essai de Critique"

1932

Aalto may be taken as a standard of excellence by which Siza will be compared, to determine Siza's position relative to Aalto since he is an architect of world renown. He was chosen as a 'model' for several reasons. Both Aalto and Siza share a similar philosophical position and rationale of design: a respect for site and an understanding of its interaction, social and humanistic concerns, and a love of form and spatial complexity. As well, they relate in terms of their individual countries' specific national concerns. Similarities between Portugal and Finland exist despite the great distance separating the countries. Both countries are situated on the extremities of Europe; both were forced to struggle for political and cultural freedom: Finland, from first Swedish, then Russian domination and Portugal, from the fascist regime sixty years later.

*is this anthropological*

*different one was foreign  
" " homegrown*

When studying Aalto and Siza, one realizes the irrelevance of time where they are concerned. Neither verbalized their positions vis à vis architecture to any great length; both are more concerned with a concrete reality, with the work in progress. They shared no strict theoretical stance, yet have profound realistic philosophies in terms of themselves and their architecture. They belong to different architectural periods, but their attitudes and affinities remain the same. Their's is a realistic architecture, one based on need. With respect to Aalto, Siza said: "Formal complexity is born of real complexity. If not it would be an abstraction. I think that it is not possible to invent a complexity; it is too abstract. For Aalto, it is the conjunction of a real complexity, that is, of a collective effort of reconstruction (he is referring to the reconstruction after the war) and of an architect who has many references, in a country a little isolated in terms of cultural view from large centres like Paris. He was able to make a collection of all this (the references) and use it like a tool in a context that allows one to apply it for the purpose of collective interest. It is a rare moment for an architect."(1)

*both do funny sketches*

*is very pertinent*





Neither Aalto nor Siza is interested in the introduction of artificial or abstract forms of complexity; their's is not an elitist architecture but one that includes references; whether historical, referring to influences that have been either implanted or absorbed into an architectural culture, from other cultures, or traditional, referring to native vernacular or to regional architecture, whenever appropriate.

Finland reacted to this cultural domination by the development of a national romantic movement, seen to emerge in 1895 and based on the Finnish national epic poem, the 'Kalevela'. The Finnish National Romantic style was parallel to, and rivalled, the development of a Romantic Classicist style (1910). It was influenced by Schinkel and identified with Russian imperialism since this was the style used under Russian domination. Many examples of this still exist in Helsinki. It coincided as well with the establishment of Art Nouveau in Europe, and was based mainly on the craftsmanship and the vernacular architecture of Finland's eastern province of Karelia. Aalto had this to say about Karelia's architecture: "The first essential feature of interest is Karelian architecture's uniformity. There are few comparable examples in Europe. Another significant feature is the manner in which the Karelian house has come about, both its historical development and its building methods. Without going into ethnographic details, we can conclude that the inner system of construction results from a methodical accommodation to circumstance."<sup>(2)</sup> The Romantic Movement attempted to re-unite all the arts in this cultural protest, and was initially promoted by the Finnish painter Gallén-Kallela, along with Sibelius representing music, and with three young architects of the renowned Finnish pavilion of 1900: Gesellius (1874-1929), Lindgren (1874-1929) and Saarinen (1873-1950) and, at some distance, Lars Sonck. (Fig. 54).

Akin to Finland's national romantic movement was a search

taken into Portuguese popular architecture in the late 1940's. Then, the great richness of their reality was made apparent but, unlike in Finland where this rich vernacular was weaved into a poetic language, both paralleling and in response to the Imperial Classical style, in Portugal this had the reverse effect. There it was taken up by the fascist regime and used as a 'model' to enforce on the architectural body. It became a means of cultural domination, and the Portuguese looked to modernism as a 'redeeming style' rather than to their vernacular.

Portugal faced an identity crisis which increased in momentum after the revolution of April 25th, 1974, when it found itself in the cross-fire between international influences and regionalism. Yet, the union of expertise and the spirit of co-operation which existed in Portugal in the period after the 25th of April, during which time the language of the 'modern' was developed became relevant to the present and to the social and living conditions of the people. A spirit of humanism existed, and produced a fine-tuning of the principles of the 'modern' into the Portuguese context.

The period after the 25th of April resulted in a rebirth of architecture, with the architectural body questioning the language of the 'modern', adapting and transforming it to their 'concrete reality'. This was a period of great significance for Siza because it was then that the greatest architectural intervention took place on a significant scale, with the operation S.A.A.L. (Ambulatory Local Technical Support). Whole sections of the population became involved with technical teams in a united effort to rebuild neglected areas of the city and so help alleviate the acute housing situation which existed. Even so, the scale of the reconstruction was, of course, not comparable with the massive scale of Finland's reconstruction after the war when, for example, Aalto and many architects replanned whole town centres.

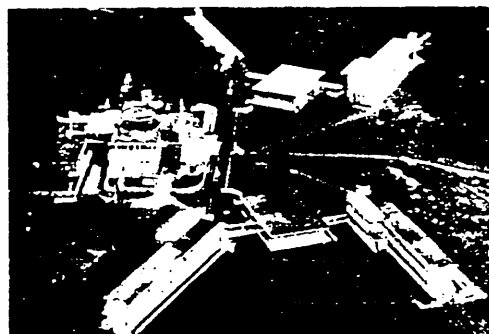
Of this, Siza said: "Aalto's best works were realized after the war, in a period where a great collective movement existed which attempted to lift Finland from its ruins, and affirm its identity. The works of Aalto from this period reflect all the complexity, all the effort of the country, because of his capacity for understanding and belonging to a movement. For me this is Aalto's great moment." (3) About himself, he says: "After the 25th of April, our work was even more linked to forces of transformation, of historical significance. Before, our work was an alienated work, marginal and, after the 25th of April, we were able to intervene into the heart of a transforming movement of great significance." (4)

Finland accepted the oncoming of the Modern Movement with greater ease than most countries. The ease with which it was accepted was, perhaps, not surprising since it could be seen as the logical evolution of classicist tendencies that were in evidence within Finnish traditional architecture, and had flowered into a new Classical style influenced from as far afield as Italy, as well as by the works of Tessenow, Asplund and, later, through the teachings of Le Corbusier. It must be differentiated from the Russian-inspired Empire style much in evidence in Helsinki. The transition from Neo-Classical to Modernism was, therefore, not as difficult a transformation. Modernism's greatest spokesman became Aalto, but others were involved in its introduction, specifically Erik Bryggman, P.E. Blomstedt and Hilding Edlund. (5) Aalto saw the 'modern' in terms of the possibilities it afforded to produce a new architecture, relevant in his case to the reconstruction of his country. He wrote: "Finland should be the first place for experiment, experience, research, in the human activity now called reconstruction. It is the country's duty to humanity." (6) In Finland, as in Portugal, there was an acceptance of the possibilities offered by twentieth century modernism, but no strict adherence of its dogmas or to the

'International Style'; instead there was a careful selection and integration, or a transformation, of certain principles in order to develop personal languages. Both Siza and Aalto share this scepticism with regard to international movements, welcoming of change but only when based on a real development in architectural terms.

On the question of influences, Aalto was always reticent since he did not view these, or employ them, as 'appliqué'. They were often forms or elements for which he had an affinity or which had evolved after many considerations. Aalto wrote on this question of influences: "Nothing old is ever reborn. But it never completely disappears either, and anything that has ever been always re-emerges in a new form." (7) To this Siza, as if in response, said: "Historical references or influences are instruments that an architect possesses; they are his inheritance of knowledge, of information. There is no reason to have complexes about this point. They become the sum total of all possible experiences which one can use. In a realistic context, the architect uses these instruments in terms of the context. Then, it is not a problem, it signifies the wisest use possible in a given context." (8)

Aalto's Paimio Sanatorium at Paimo (1928) (Fig. 55) was always likened to Duiker's Sanatorium at Hilversum (Fig. 56). What was present were like minds with similar social concerns developing similar vocabularies, each developing these to suit particular site and programmatic concerns. At this time, there was a cumulative awareness, a certain spirit that existed, regardless of national boundaries, that had to do with idealism. These same social or humanist tendencies existed in many architects of that epoch, primarily in Europe, which resulted in a mutual appreciation and collective maturing of architecture, a true collectivism of spirit and object.

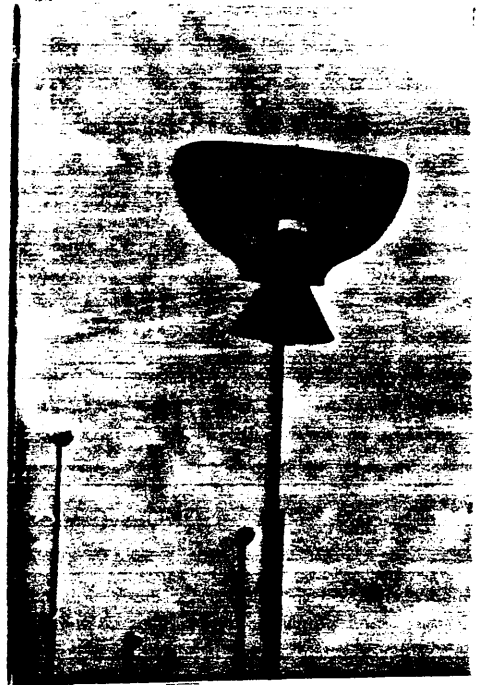
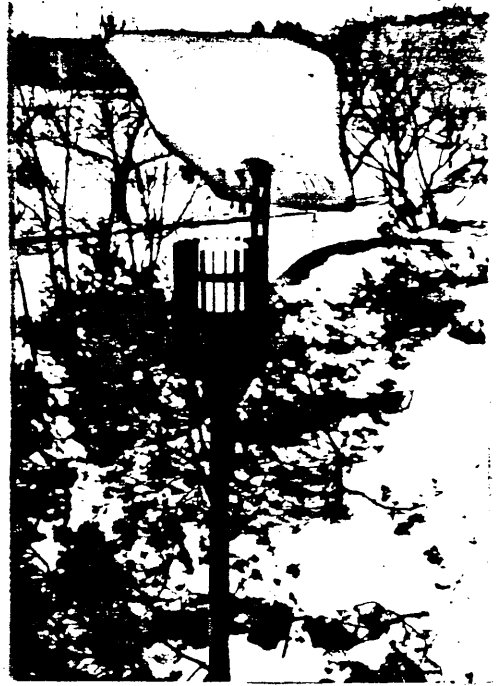


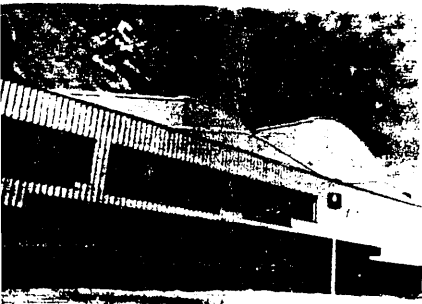
Both Siza and Aalto are concerned with the relationships between a way of life and architecture; that is, an architecture based on the routines of life, involving eccentricities and repetition, the two duals of life itself, and where historical context is a part of this life. Aalto wrote eloquently on this important topic: "One of the most difficult architectural problems is the shaping of the building's surroundings to the human scale. It would be good if... the organic movement of people could be incorporated in the shaping of the site in order to create an intimate relationship between Man and Architecture."<sup>(9)</sup> Siza explains that what interests him is "to understand the relationship between a way of life and architecture".<sup>(10)</sup> As he says: "With Operation S.A.A.L., it was a little like a small bourgeois house in that one could have a direct contact with people; to know how they live, what their problems are, their tastes... These meetings were very rich and informative, and allowed us to rapidly understand the transformations, the conflicts... All this serves to sustain the project."<sup>(11)</sup>

In terms of methodology, Siza claims that, due to the practical work undertaken after the 25th of April, the architects concerned (himself included), had not really developed a theoretical stance; there was no testing of theories. Instead, they appeared to begin a project open to the site and relationships to the city and, on the basis of a visual and programmatic analysis, made a judgement as to possible organizations. This requires an involvement in terms of the historical context and allows the practical workings of architecture to be established.

Siza does not see the site as static, but in transformation. His role is to intervene in this transformation. He describes how he saw F.L. Wright and his position to the site as being one of interaction; where particularly his houses were always situated

half-way up a slope, engulfed by scenery, within a strict organization. Le Corbusier as well, in the thirties, made objects and models, involving both theory and a parallel applicability, and hoped for the profound transformation of society. Siza explained: "My method is totally different. One must search and understand the forces of transformation that have a historical value, and work from there. When working on a site in transformation, one cannot fix characteristics. From one place to another it is different and very complex. This is why one cannot apply a pre-established language."(12) Siza's method is an intuitive one or, more precisely, one whose dual is practicability. What I imply by practical is an ongoing system of manipulation, juggling basic architectural elements of space, wall, column, stair and room, in relation to space in terms of what Porphyrios isolated as the 'aura' of the site and particular context.(13) This, I would describe as the atmospheric conditions imposed by the site in particular. I isolate site because it is a major constraint, program being the other. This is substantiated by the existence of numerous sketches from multiple viewpoints, using the restrictions imposed by the site to his advantage, resulting in many arrangements and views. Aalto's method too was "a continual process, open, complex, and all englobing. He showed that the drawing arises from a permanent dialogue between what pre-exists and the collective desire of transformation."(14) Aalto uses site as part of the building composition; it becomes moulded into a setting against which the architecture rises. The site becomes horizontal planes which rise from level to level, a part of the three-dimensional composition. Routes are planned through the site; different vistas are framed. Nature is part of the composition. Like Siza, Aalto allows Nature to filter into his buildings by either framed openings or by the use of natural roof lighting which allows for direct contact with the sky; there is no exclusion of Nature, it permeates both the interior and the





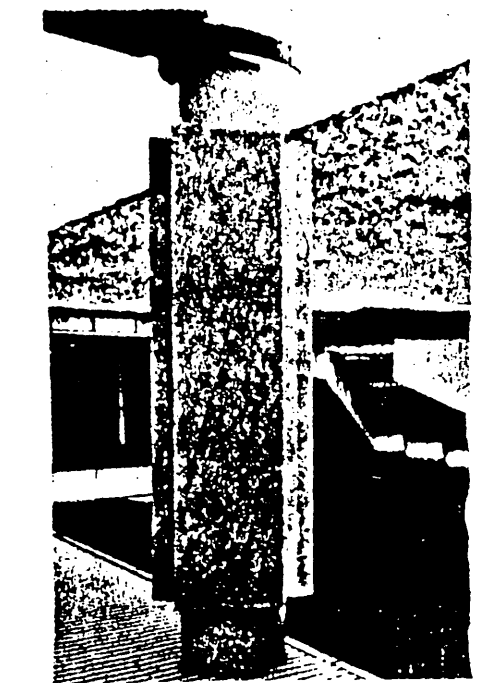
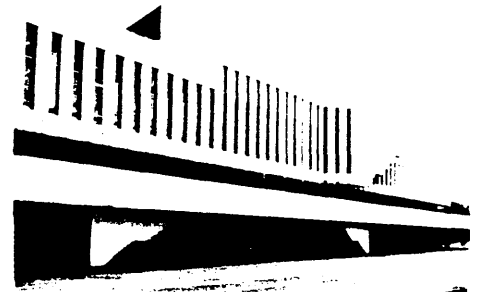
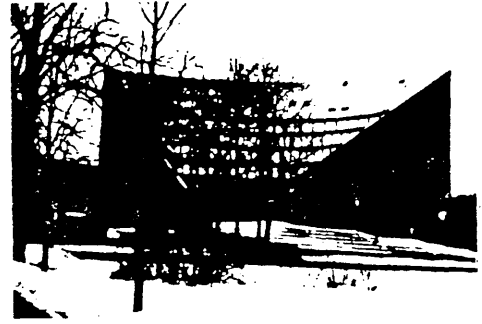
exterior. References to it also exist in the detailing which can take many forms, like the sinuous biological quality impregnating his exterior lighting; for example, the grounds of Finlandia Hall (1959-1962), Helsinki (**Fig. 57**) and the grounds of Seinäjoki church (**Fig. 58**). References to Nature also occur on the exterior, reflected in, for example, the organic curves of the congress hall which is part of Finlandia Hall (1959) (**Fig. 59**). His use of materials reminds us of the variety of colours and qualities inherent in Nature. This points to a romantic sensibility arousing emotions not unlike those associated with the national Finnish Romantic Movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Lappia house (**Fig. 60**), the libraries at Seinäjoki and Rovaneimi, as well as Finlandia Hall, are most explicit as to Aalto's interpretation of Finland's inspiring landscape.

Aalto's buildings are generally sited so that they appear on a clearing, but here the 'clearing' is a planned one: the building is set back so one can carefully consider it; it remains in constant view as one approaches. The church at Seinäjoki, (**Fig. 61**) particularly, forces us gently to come closer. One first perceives the tower which rises to a great height; as one approaches, a majestic quality emanates. This marks the creation of the modern day monument; it is humanistic because the scale is never overbearing, but commands respect because it states an opinion, a belief. This is true of all his architecture: the public libraries but, particularly, the town halls at Seinäjoki (1959) (**Fig. 62**) and at Säynätsalo (1949-1952) (**Fig. 63**).

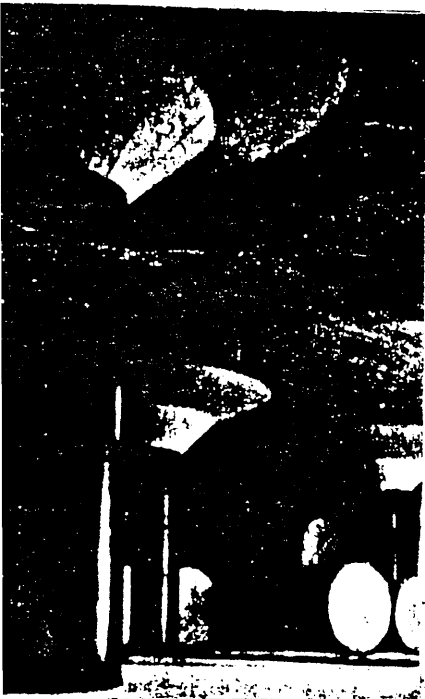
Siza allows different relationships to occur, as if influenced by the complexities of life itself and its extenuating effects. In this way, the building is seen to be influenced by its surroundings and is, in a way, 'contaminated' by them. (The word 'contamination' here is used in the literary sense as "the

blending of two tales''; in Siza's case, several.) The form is enriched by this 'contamination'. Only the purity of the exterior is preserved, resulting in the appearance of the 'hybrid', a reflection of the relationships within the building as well as with the exterior, a picture of urban complexity. This describes the complexity which should be seen as the overlapping of these relationships, involving the crossing of several axes, and the destruction of others. The building is therefore, a description of this reflection. "One must not only create relationships with reality, but also between spaces and materials. These relationships should be established between the project, what surrounds it and also between the different parts of the project themselves. In the interior of the project the relationships become fatally eclectic, hybrid, as it is the external realities that must penetrate and 'contaminate' the whole project."(15)

Demitri Porphyrios described Aalto's design method as one that incorporates an anti-grid, consisting of fragments co-existing with little geometrical rapport, within a sea of spaces and buffers in what some 'modernists' would have termed disorder.(16) However, what is important to remember when considering Aalto's work is that these elements have a distinct rapport; they form part of a story which Aalto tells differently, if only slightly, in all his buildings, but most particularly in his later examples. These are to be found in the library at the Otaniemi Institute of Technology (1955) (Fig. 64), in the library at Rovaniemi (Fig. 65), and Finlandia Hall (Fig. 66) in Helsinki to name but three. This particular sensibility must form part of Aalto's conceptual framework or philosophy since it becomes a recurring theme; the differences occurring in the use of varied materials, textures, a change in scale and, ultimately, in the detailing where elements are dressed for the part which they play; some referring to history and past traditions, others to nature.







allowing the rich myths to unfold. Many examples of these exist, such as the columns of the museum in Aalborg (Fig. 67), the columns of the Turun Sanomat building in Turku (1928) (Fig. 68), or the 'I want to be alone' columns of the Jyväskylä Academy (Fig. 69).

Siza, in comparison, shared none of Aalto's planning themes. The interior is a whole; the atrium spaces of both banks being fluid spaces, accentuated by architectural elements such as stairs etc., none of which detracts from the complex spatial whole (Fig. 70)

Each element in Aalto's compositions play a part in the overall architectural scenario. The same stylistic eclecticism is portrayed is his juxtaposition of unlike materials, which may be defined as textural and descriptive. Materials become part of his architectural palette in an almost painterly fashion unusual for the twentieth century as he uses to advantage their sensual qualities and exploits their differences, much like de Klerk and Berlage before him.

This forms another major difference with Siza for he rarely includes more than two materials (except in his earlier work); all materials chosen are smooth so that nothing interferes with form; with Siza, it is ultimately the sculptural form of the architecture that predominates. Nothing must detract from its image. There is no story involving history, only an implicit understanding of it, as absorption with no physical inclusion. Marble is sometimes used but for a specific purpose, either to delineate progression or to add an architectural accent of sorts, much like a dab of coloured paint, abstractly situated (Fig. 71). If eclecticism is present it is in the form of a spatial play; for example, a sculpted ceiling which cuts space so it is almost a physical object (Fig. 72)

Aalto's method can be described as a composite one, a 'hybrid' involving both an intuitive and an abstract system with an associative historical approach. Both of these systems are apparent formally and in plan. Aalto, like Siza, has a predilection for form; he assembles and composes volumes into formal or a-formal compositions which we can tentatively define as 'type'. The formal compositions tend to be ones associated with civic values, such as the town halls at Seinäjoki or Säynätsalo, or Finlandia concert hall (1962). Here we can see a distinct volumetric layering; from colonnaded ground floor, to articulated first and second floors, sometimes united in one volume, and finally to a form of specific height and modulation, frequently enclosing an auditorium or other space of that nature. Buildings such as his libraries, cultural centres or museums are more free-form, but also include, although to lesser degrees, a similar articulation. This can be seen at both the library at Rovaneimi and the Lappia house.

Siza's compositional layering is, again, dissimilar. The two banks show the building envelope simplifying the internal complexity. There is a further simplification of the envelope as one progresses from the bank at Oliveira de Azeméis (Fig.73) to his bank at Vila do Conde (Fig.74). The bank at Oliveira de Azeméis still portrays complex articulations at roof level. This exterior articulation is less systematic when compared with Aalto's distinct volumetric layering.

Does this constitute 'type', or does it simply express his predilection for particular forms? Porphyrios explained that 'types' do indeed form part of Aalto's vocabulary, and evoke associations: the iconographic type of the crown, which denoted hierarchy of importance in terms of height; the use of planimetric and sectional types such as the court-type; a traditionally Finnish architectural type.(16) This could be the result of inherent Scandinavian or Finnish tradition being



absorbed, having been passed through time.

Type is a more uncertain concept in Siza's work, more difficult to identify, since his buildings are not as numerous when compared to Aalto's output. We do identify the traditional Portuguese courtyard appearing mainly in his private houses although an enclosed garden occurs at his bank at Vila do Conde. Simplified façades occur in all examples, regardless of building function. This points more toward a particular design philosophy than to existence of a type.

In the discussion of the whole, one discovers interesting comparisons. Siza's buildings include two 'wholes', almost disparate: the elevation, or enveloping skin, and the interior consisting of a modulated space cut by elements such as floor, sculpted ceiling, stair, each floor level visually linked; an intricately worked network, with no abruptness from one space to another. Aalto, whose buildings deal in 'parts', paradoxically retain a 'whole' due to his volumetric layering, which is carefully considered in terms of proportion and composition, the exterior always a reflection of the fragmentary interior. The 'parts' become distinct masses, enveloped in a variegated skin.

The generous sites available to Aalto encourage a far greater freedom since he was able to mold the site into a setting for his building objects which, consequently, picturesquely frame his architecture. All his buildings inspire tranquility and stability. He was rarely faced with the tight urban sites which Siza often has to contend with. Perhaps this is another factor determining the additional tension in Siza's buildings, since they give the impression that the interiors are only just contained by the enveloping façades. The tensions resulting from the internal complexities, the site and its context, cause almost the escape of the interior, which finds itself unable to be



further constrained by the strict abstract exterior.

One can, however, detect a further evolution of the principles of the modern in Siza's work, further transforming architectural and conceptual frameworks, developing the concept of a hybrid to best reflect our times and his own personal philosophy. Similarities between Siza and Aalto exist; architecture's basic attributes, these being: a love for architecture, a passion for its formulations, its essence; from the site, to the context, to the difficulties. They feel no fear of either the present or the future; they have an innate understanding of the desires of man: being in harmony in the city and their particular world, the home. They understand our need to be excited, our need for calm, for darkness and luminosity, for the banal, the repetitive and the novel. Their interpretation is our delight.

# Footnotes:

## Part 4

1. **Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité No. 44**, 1978, 'Entretien avec Alvaro Siza', p. 33
2. Kenneth Frampton, **Modern Architecture**, p. 192
3. **Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité No. 44**, 'Entretien', p. 33
4. **Ibid.**,
5. Raija-Liisa Heinonen, **Architectural Monograph 4**, Alvar Aalto: Some Aspects of 1920's Classicism and the Emergence of Functionalism in Finland, p. 21.
6. **Aalto: Postwar Reconstruction**, 'Synopsis', p. 20
7. **Aalvar Aalto — 1898-1976**, Museum of Finnish Architecture, p. 69
8. **Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité No. 44**,
9. 'Entretien' p. 33  
Kenneth Frampton, **Modern Architecture**, p. 197
10. **Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité No. 44**, 'Entretien', p. 34
11. **Ibid.**, p. 39
12. **Ibid.**, p. 36
13. Demetri Porphyrios, **Sources of Modern Eclecticism**, p. 41
14. **L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui No. 211**, October 1980, 'Interview', p. 1
15. **Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité No. 44**, 1978, p. 36
16. Demetri Porphyrios, **Sources of Modern Eclecticism**, pp. 2-4
17. **Ibid.**, pp. 28, 31, 34



# Part 5

## The Interview: A Test of the 'Spirit of the Modern'

**"Picasso once remarked I do not care who it is that  
has or does influence me as long as it is not myself." \***

\* Gertrude Stein 1936

'Look at me now and here I am'

'What are masterpieces and why are there so  
few of them.'

**Q:** Do you think it is important to develop a methodology?

**A:** Yes, of course.

**Q:** Is it not possible to tackle a site almost visually; that is, use a program but visually develop a different system for each building?

**A:** Your proposals can be instinctive in the beginning; a direct reaction, but then to control the process rationally there must be a body of ideas to refer to, in order that you do not lose yourself in the process. This body of ideas must be firm, sure, and then, through a critical procedure, the development of the project will be controlled.

**Q:** Are the body of ideas the same, or do they change?

**A:** It depends of course but, as a matter of fact, I do not have a predetermined theory that can answer all the questions. The analysis, or 'critique' must include everything: from reality, to the initial ideas, function, technical problems, as well as economical problems. These factors must relate to each other for the development of the project to occur, or else there will be an incomplete development, a fragmented work.

**Q:** How do you think you have developed, say, from the Boa Nova tea-house and restaurant at Matosinhos (1958-1963) (Fig. 75).

It is very different from the work you are doing now.

**A:** The Boa Nova tea-house is a very old work, not a good example to pick to consider the development of a project. I developed it as I could because it was almost my first work; today I think I work more quietly since I have had more experience, many more contacts (architectural). I have read, looked and studied.

**Q:** Like most architects, you needed Boa Nova to begin with.

**A:** Yes. However, I think there is a connection that united all the projects. My reaction to each project was not accidental, for architectural languages were not indiscriminately used. My work has a line of development, of evolution. So if you consider them even so far back in time you will see some relationship. They can be different in form; that is, of course,







another question.

**Q:** Do you think it is possible to develop a vocabulary for form; for instance, a form that looks like a bank, a form that looks like a house? Is that possible?

**A:** I think there are some special types of buildings, according mainly to practical reasons; a private house has not normally a need for very large spaces, so the proportions and the relationships between the different parts are equilibrated. If you have a public building you have parts of another nature which give different proportions, different characteristics are given to the building but I am not interested in fixing types of buildings.

**Q:** Is it then the internal organization that reflects program, the practicalities; the exterior not having to be concerned greatly?

**A:** Yes, that's right, but the exterior is influenced since the interior and the exterior are always related, so functional problems are reflected outside. I don't like to hide in the exterior form of the building the tensions that exist inside. There is a component of internal organization that is a characteristic of the building but only as a part, since there are many other things that influence the development of form.

**Q:** Do you think that your exterior façades are a portrait of the interior?

**A:** Not always. In a way they are, but not totally, since the development of a building, of architecture, always goes through different tensions. You have internal needs of program, but you have exterior conditions. They can be very strong or can be not so strong. For instance, the house of my brother (Antonio Carlos Siza House, Santo Tirso, 1976-1977); as you can see in this case, the context, the form, and dimensions of the building were influenced because the site was irregular (**Fig. 76**). It was difficult to put that house there. So in this case the influence of the context of the site was very important. These influences are strong in one direction or in another direction,

according to circumstances in each particular case.

**Q:** Interaction with the people during the design process still interests you?

**A:** If not, it would be very difficult to begin a project. In the planning of housing areas, the participation of habitants is very normal. We had experience here with S.A.A.L. and also, for instance, in Holland. In Holland, it is normal that, in the discussions for social housing, there are representatives of the habitants. Sometimes it becomes a kind of obsession. There is an exaggeration and sometimes there is also a fight for power. What is good and necessary is the dialogue, and mutual knowledge. Now, in this process, sometimes there are distortions. If you do not have openness in this discussion of architecture, you become narrower each time, and that produces academicism. This is not a stimulant for ideas.

**Q:** Your bank at Oliveria de Azemésis (1971-1974) has regulating lines and some reach into the exterior to the site itself (**Fig. 77**). I described how I thought that Oliveira de Azemésis was in conversation with other buildings; this is proved by the regulating lines, very subtly. Is this true?

**A:** Yes that is true. I have not the imagination to think completely of a building, to invent a building. I never did find ideas so sure that I was disposed to apply them. I have to look for the reasons from other buildings, so I look around, and around is not only the site; sometimes around can mean China, Japan... But looking around, more and more there are connections, relationships between everything in the world and all people. So you have a lot of suggestions.

**Q:** In the end, every architect should have his own particular design code; there should be no general system, should there?

**A:** I think there can be, or we can build one. A universal body of knowledge for this profession is necessary, but that body of knowledge cannot mean a reduction in freedom, in creation; on the contrary, it must mean support, a very sure support. It can become a guarantee for the general quality of architecture.

I think it is possible to achieve this, and with this support, you are free to think about architecture, to be sensitive to special contexts, to special circumstances you can control.

**Q:** And how do you think these universal rules can be worked out amongst architects?

**A:** It has to be the result of a lot of contributions; it is not possible individually. It will occur by comparing different contributions and proposals and reflecting about them. One must never close in on one's own work only but, on the contrary, be constantly informed and analyze different proposals. In this moment we have a lot of tendencies, a big dispersion. The orthodoxy of the Modern Movement occurred in a special moment in time, as a result of changes in society; it became necessary to contest that universal body of knowledge and to make different experiments to enlarge the research on architecture; now it is necessary to maintain the balance and to see very well what is going on.

**Q:** Do you think it will ever happen?

**A:** I think that a lot of people are thinking about architecture; the closed dimension of discussion in architecture is disappearing. It is being discussed more and more by other people; it is positive. Of course, maybe it has a temporary consequence, a big dispersion. Probably it is the moment today. But, because of that dispersion, you cannot lose yourself again as in a convent; it is necessary to develop a discussion about architecture and the possibilities of experiment and the general critique, with the participation of everybody in the discussion about architecture, not only architects.

**Q:** Are you alone in this thinking or are there also others?

**A:** If I was alone I would be very unhappy. There are many architects who think this. For example, in many international competitions today the analysis of projects is open: not only a jury, but many different participants, sometimes including representatives of the area for instance, and the different architects and others discuss together. In some cases there is

exchanging ideas. This is the forum for this discussion.

**Q:** In the twenties and thirties, there was a group of architects world-wide who had common ideals regardless of nationality, boundary. . . . Do you think such a union exists now?

**A:** I don't think so. Perhaps it exists, but does not include many people. There are many groups with different ideals, and not so many convictions. Nobody is so sure of their ideas to be able to organize a movement. But individuals exist of course. I have some friends myself, architectural contacts, and sometimes we meet and discuss together. I think that not one of us thinks of a real movement.

**Q:** Do you think there should be a real movement?

**A:** I think it is not possible today.

**Q:** Why not today?

**A:** Because we are not in a situation to have big convictions; we have many doubts. So when you speak of the twenties and thirties, those people had an idea of the ideal life, ideal world, ideal organization; they had big convictions. It was very strong, very authentic. If you don't have such big convictions, and I think that nobody has, you are not able to organize a movement.

**Q:** But if you ask each one if they had an idea of an ideal architecture, an ideal life, you don't think they could answer that question?

**A:** Yes, they can. They have, but they know that the reality of the work does not provide the possibility of a large intervention. You cannot have a big intervention; you may only build something here or there. There is no place for a strong international movement.

**Q:** Disappointing isn't it? Or just a fact of life?

**A:** It reflects the situation today. The Modern Movement had an important opportunity after the war; all the architects had work, yet the result was a failure in a way. It was not as

brilliant as people say.

**Q:** So what do you think it is now? Is it the Modern Movement revived? What is it?

**A:** One of the things that is important in Europe today is that towns are not growing; even sometimes they are shrinking. People go to live in the country. There is no improvement in construction and architecture. There is not much work. It is more a question of 'recuperating structures'. There is also an economical crisis so there is no impetus for architecture. It is a time to think.

**Q:** Is there a possibility of a Portuguese national architecture?

**A:** (from memory) He answered that it is impossible to have a truly national architecture because of all the influences possible, since architecture is a 'world' architecture, a 'world' art.

**Q:** Which areas in Portugal interest you the most?

**A:** It is difficult to give you an answer because there are many quite different regions; for instance, Evora is absolutely different: it is Mediterranean, it has an Arab tradition. The North is Celtic; materials are different in the north, there is stone. I like it very much. I could say all regions in Portugal, all the architecture, is very good. That is, what remains; a great deal was destroyed. On the coast, the Algarve, tourism has destroyed and changed many areas. In the interior, the area around Evora for example it is fantastic. In Evora there is a wall, the town, the cathedral; it is very beautiful; and then, quite near, you have small villages which are absolutely pure expressions of architecture; they have not been developed. You can see the original traditional architecture.

**Q:** How do you see architecture? Is it sculpture? Is it a combination of painting and sculpture? Or a totally different art form?

**A:** (from memory) Siza answered that he thought of architecture primarily as form, the sculptural element being of great importance to him; but he said that as the project progressed, different elements would assume a greater or

from different levels of transparency... to programmatic concerns.

**Q:** Do you believe in the concept of 'modern'? I defined it using a series of principles. How would you define it?

**A:** The concept of modern which I support is concerned with the absence of inhibition towards the past or towards any supposed future. The 'modern' is continuity more than rupture, however, always autonomous; suspended. So, in a way, intemporal, englobing history, the present, the impressions, reasons, intuition, circumstances, the site and the distant. The 'spirit of the modern' is precarious and open; it stays on a sliding desk.

Porto, May 1986. Interview conducted by the author in english.

*useful interview but quite...*



# Conclusion: An Architect's Comment on The Present

What Siza calls a "universal body of knowledge" is what I refer to as the 'principles of the modern', universal principles that transcend time. The existence and evolution of these principles were described in Part 1. Their acceptance, in part or in total, was most obvious in the 1920's and 1930's, when the communal voice of architecture was most evident, but was also present throughout architectural history. The transformation and the development of these principles was at its height of creativity in this period, and reflected social and humanitarian concerns.

Part 2 further continues the epic of the transformation of these principles within Portugal where vociferous support of the modern took place, resulting in its most famous Portuguese exponent of our times, Alvaro Siza. He is seen to be developing and experimenting with what he calls a "universal body of ideas", with the same seriousness and intensity of his forerunners of the 1920's and 1930's, also sharing their same social concerns, these being reflected in his architecture.

Aalto shared similar concerns, and these humanist tendencies unite architects despite cultural and national boundaries, disregarding distance and time. It is, therefore, no surprise to find Aalto and Siza side by side in Part 4. Common ideals exist, similar political struggles within their respective countries; only the era and the complexities inherent in each era changed. These resulted in Siza's further transformation of



the principles of the modern, to reflect added complexities of the 1980's, thus continuing the spirit of the modern into our epoch.

The 'modern' and its principles are alive today, although much subdued, within the confusion of our times. Many 'schools' exist side by side; Eclecticism is in vogue. Of the seriousness within architecture, of the testing of the 'modern', there is very little. The balance is being lost between commercialism and idealism; both are necessary ingredients to reality, but an increasing imbalance is in evidence.

However, slowly, quietly, creating no furor, a new wave of consciousness is evolving; a regaining of the tenuous balance. Individual architects displaying the 'spirit of the modern' appear to be uniting in their concept of architecture. Siza himself is part of this 'rebirth', in Europe, as he has explained in the interview. It involves an innate appreciation of history, its interpretation into built form, an understanding of the city, a respect for tradition, and a passion for the art of architecture. This can be seen as a redevelopment and a continuation of the principles describing the 'modern', integrated within these architects relative positions.

Herewith lies our hope.

**Sandra Vago**

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