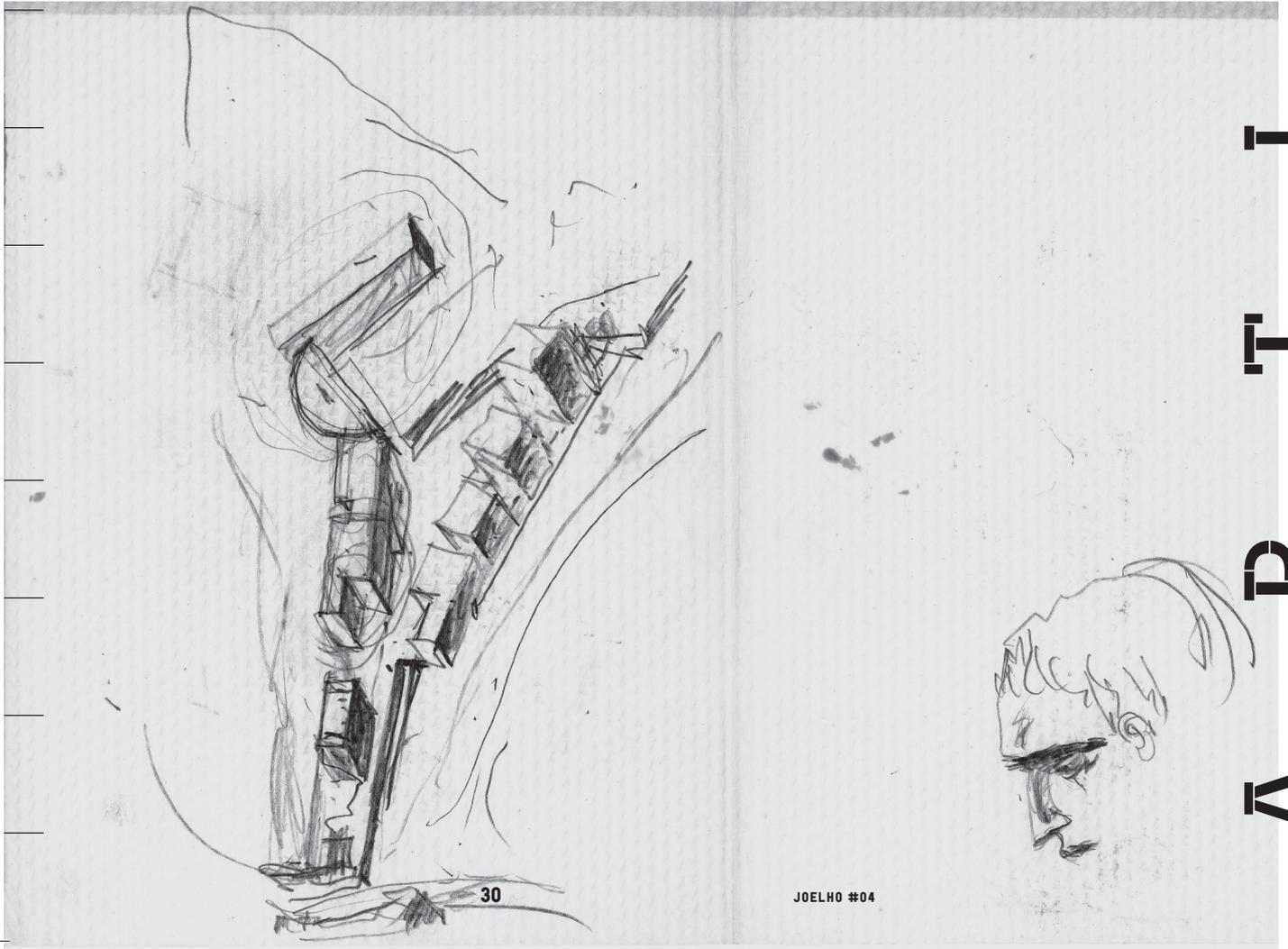


Alexandre Alves Costa
Illustrated fragments
on the "Porto School"



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1. Opening

I was first admitted into the school as a student fifty-five years ago and I have been teaching there for forty. I lived through several episodes of its history, being a traveling participant.

The first statement I would like to make is that I believe the Porto School does exist. It exists as a space for permanent thinking on architectural teaching, always trying to find its own discourse on method. Thus it has been done, and continues to be, with the simplicity of those who fulfil their duty, not impairing thought nor overly theorizing. I state it not with pride, but realism!

Following the interest expressed by some sectors of international criticism, rather than at the national level, in determining the defining parameters of an hypothetical style and the temporal boundaries in the development of this “school” (regarded in the sense of a “trend”), we gradually became aware that this title should mainly relate to a group of architects who recognize themselves, like it or not, through their own existence.

I leave it to others, younger, smarter and with a more academic spirit, to speak of it with chronological rigor, risking (supposedly scientifically substantiated) interpretations, concluding with intense overviews of ground-breaking content. However, I must say that each episode I experienced within the school draws parallels to many others we have all lived in Portugal. It would not be fair to think our particular place unique and exclusive, when considering the construction of knowledge that shook the ‘60s and ‘70s. This construction always takes place within a network, overlapping broader territories and drawing the advances and retreats of a comprehensive ever-transforming reality.

I have also never been in favour of any interpretive theory that is based on the permanent presence of a genius commanding the school as if it was his own. A school is a group. We were and are many. The story of each and every one in particular can never be the history of the School, but rather his own story. It is the crossing of several narratives, from those who knew how to reverse their direction for our common home that stands as the true history of the institution and of how in it architecture is taught or learned.

Of course it is important to know the Masters, choosing those that we believe had more meaning and relating them with their buildings. The same people who were both at the building site and at school, making it impossible to speak of one without referencing the other. The school, in fact, has always depended on what was being designed in the studio, making that the understanding we have of architecture springs from its practice. But because this compared chronology is not always synchronized, one must be wary of approaches that are forged only inside our mind, forcing dates, languages, concepts or methods.

I have for myself, and I have defended it on numerous occasions that in the School of Porto the common understanding, over time, can be explained through circumstances outside any prior

1. Faculty of Architecture, drawing by Álvaro Siza, s.d. AAC archive.

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