


# CAPUCHIN CONVENT

SUSPENDING TIME...



Within the cultural landscape of Alferrara, near the city of Lisbon - Portugal, lies the ruin of the Capuchin Convent, founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Its cultural significance is unmeasurable. As stewards of this heritage, it is our common duty to safeguard the continuity of this architectural and spiritual legacy.

Intervening in abandoned religious heritage requires one to listen, feel, wander, and convert to the minimum design the signs that emanate from a place whose meanings have changed with the passage of time. In order to mitigate potential damage, our methodological intervention process considers the perception of experiences throughout history as an intrinsic part of the site values. Consequently, although it was urgent to provide a secure use of the spaces, time is required to comprehend the cultural memory of the place.

Working with built heritage intangible values, contemporary interventions have guided our architectural approach. The memories of use were incorporated within the atmospheres that the original construction suggested, calling on our senses to define new experiences in this Convent in ruins. It may now be said that this cultural heritage place has finally been returned to its community.

**vmsa architects, Portugal**

REFLECTIONS SERIES



vmsa architects, Portugal

# CAPUCHIN CONVENT

SUSPENDING TIME...

**Title** | Capuchin Convent. Suspending time... vmsa architects, Portugal

**Collection** | UoU Reflections Series

**Issue** | #01 | 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Lisbon (Portugal), 2022

**Editor** | Javier Sánchez Merina / Alicante University, Spain

**Graphic Design** | RMD, unip, Lda (Rafael Marques)

**Graphics** | Nuno Gaspar, Daniel Pires, Ana Vazquez

**Photography** | all vmsa archive, except pages: 3; 16-17; 70: José Manuel

**English Translation** | Sofia Aleixo

**Proofreader** | Raquel Mestre

**Paper** | Munken Pure: 120g

**Pre-printing** | RMD, unip, Lda

**Printing** | Impressral

**Legal Deposit** | 645-2022

**Edition** | Department of Graphic Expression, Design and Projects. Escuela Politécnica

Superior. ALICANTE UNIVERSITY. Carretera San Vicente del Raspeig s/n 03690 San Vicente del Raspeig. Alicante (SPAIN)

**ISBN:** 978-84-1302-206-2

**uou@ua.es**

© VMSA ARQUITECTOS LDA.2022

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording by an information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.  
Printed in Portugal.

Cover image: Capuchin Convent, East facade detail, 2012.

**vmsa**  
arquitectos  
victor mestre | sofia aleixo

  
UNIVERSIDADE DE ÉVORA

REFLECTIONS SERIES  


 Universitat d'Alacant  
Universidad de Alicante



A first version of this reflection has been published in Portuguese under the title: "Memória e recordação: valores intangíveis na intervenção contemporânea em património construído nos casos dos conventos de Alferrara". Lusitania Sacra 44 (July-December 2021), pp. 137-158.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34632/lusitaniasacra.2021.11577>.





Humanized landscape of the Capuchin Convent, Alferrara, 2012.



Field study: collecting information to recognize the material identity. Written drawing by Victor Mestre, 2010.

# Vortex in time. A humble lesson

The start of the UoU Reflexions series with the Capuchin Convent, sets of a distinctive way to address architecture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, using the case of heritage conservation. Located in the natural landscape of Arrábida, the project of Victor Mestre and Sofia Aleixo presents *Time* as the main element of the design process. It teaches us that the architect's work is a dynamic process, which generates a vortex in time, and that architectural works have their temporal processes beyond specific interventions.

This knowledge is key to understanding our contemporary work model on the city and on interventions in architectural heritage. Authorship is suspended in a process where citizens, the ecosystem and technical implementations intervene.

The uncertainty of what knowledge the next generations of designers will acquire, and what new structural and construction techniques will arise can only be anticipated by current design. The only way to anticipate the future is this, *by design*. The humbleness of the project in itself demonstrates a sustainable, integrated and intercultural work model. These are the proposed bases in education pursued by the "UNIVERSITY of Universities" (UoU), a model of dynamic knowledge with the participation of architecture teachers and students who question learning as a contribution to a whole, and where time and the evolution of knowledge and techniques enable and contribute to the construction of an inclusive future.

The publication of this vmsa architects work in Portugal, the first of the UoU Reflexions series, provides a foundation for the edition of further quality international projects, promoting the UoU commitment to an inclusive and intercultural future.

**Joaquín Alvaro Bañón**

Phd. Architect. Architecture Design Studio professor and researcher at the University Alicante, Spain.

>

[The enchantment of time on the ruin.] Written drawing by Victor Mestre, 2012.





St. Paul Convent

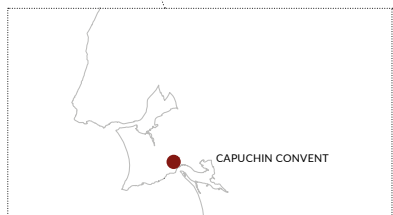
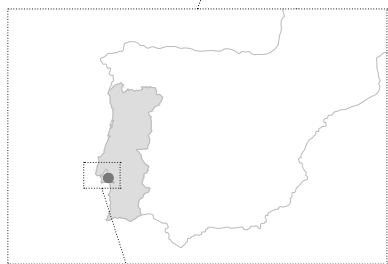




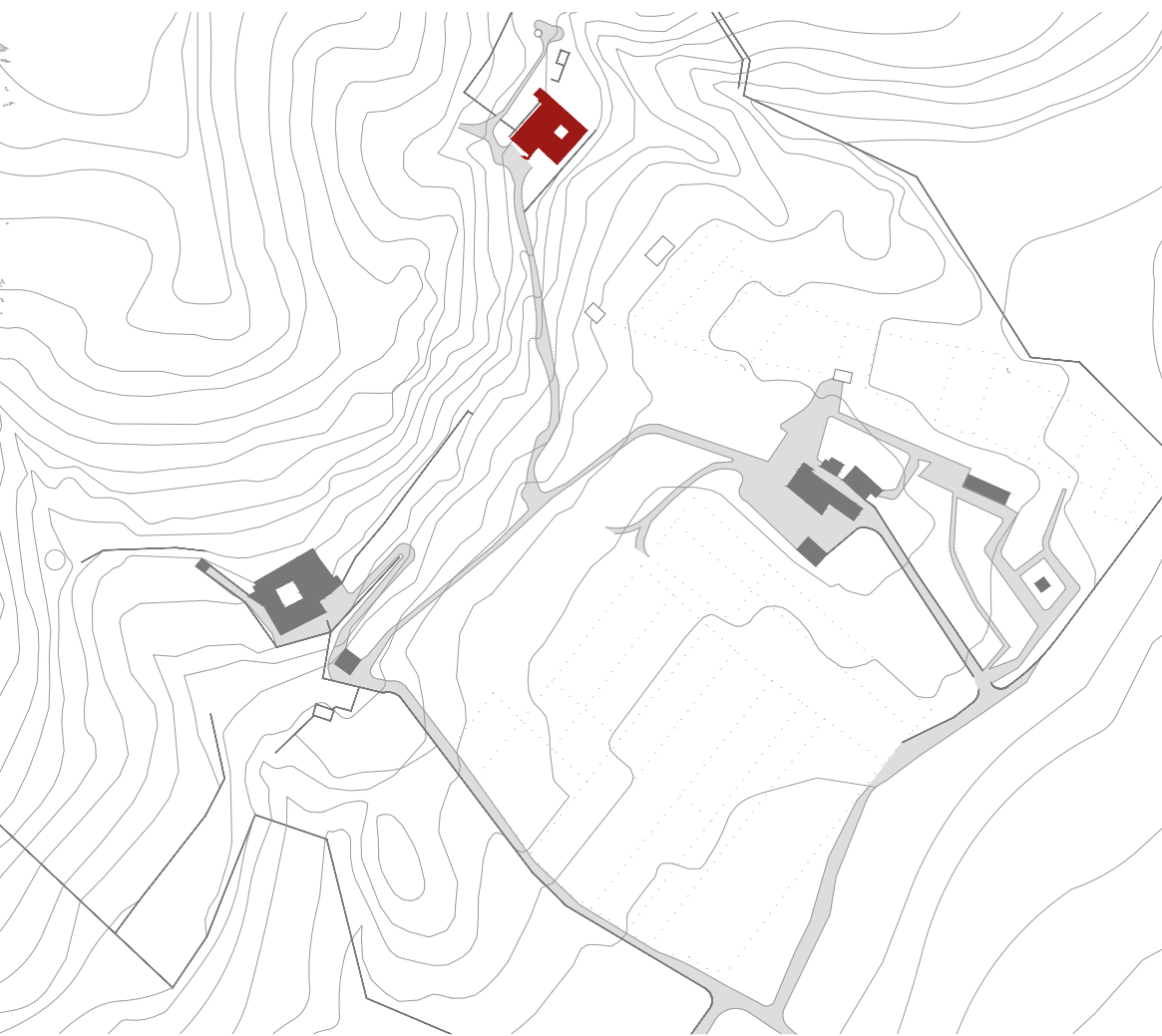
Capuchin Convent



Nature and Landscape of Alferrara, 2012.



Location of the Capuchin Convent, in Alferrara, Setúbal, Portugal.



ST PAUL CONVENT



CAPUCHIN CONVENT



| 1 | 3 | 5 | 10 | 150m |

Placement of the Alferrera Convents.





Capuchin Convent, in Alferrara (unknown date). In <http://roteiro.jmobp.com/View/RoteiroView1.php?opcao=8&item=2584>

# Memories, Monuments and Recollection

Throughout life, the accumulation of objects capable of triggering memories fills our living spaces with remembrances of past moments that, for some particular reason, have become milestones in our lives. However, besides being accumulators, we are also mediators of reminiscences of the passage of time. Above all, we are mediators of the reminiscences transmitted to us through our personal relationships, especially of those that are transmitted in person, by the person who participated in their production or by those who received these memories from the people that have experienced such events. Already in a transition process, the later embodies the previous generation which is now in charge of the transmission of such testimonies.

The records of specific memories, usually commemorative of something exceptional, are a permanent presence throughout history. However, most of them are mute testimonies, such as the eternal muteness of those registered in a marble tablet, which is known for not always resist the wear and tear of time. Curiously, and despite the impact of the new technologies on the preservation of memory<sup>1</sup>, many of these records that recall ancient periods continue to be made in the same supports, according to political, cultural or other rituals that remain since the beginning of time, in the expectation that they will also become ancient. Regarding this idea of reaching an historical value, Aloïs Riegl (Vienna, 1858-1905) framed this value in the concept of "evolving monument", in terms of its permanence in the present, within the wider framework of the antiquity value. Riegl (1984 [1903]) sets that the argument used for

**1** About this impact, and in the current moment, it is important to distinguish two types of memories that increasingly intersect each other. The "traditional memory", in the historical-temporal sense of socio-cultural memories, meets the "digital memory", in an application of contemporary registration processes. In the scope of material and immaterial heritage, the past is remembered not only by cultural practices - such as visiting a monument - but also by digital means, where the meaning attributed to the monument will result from collective stories about its identity. The analysis of material traces and narratives of past experiences in the present will contribute to understanding the processes of alteration and degradation of the material heritage, conditions that influence the dynamics of memory by establishing relationships between objects and meaning, i.e., having an impact on contemporary interpretation, in the present time. This area of knowledge developed by

the listing of "a monument" seeks to "keep it ever present and alive in the consciousness of those who will come after", a condition the author named as "intentional memory value", further illustrating the idea of conservation of this value:

A commemorative column, for example, whose inscription was erased would cease to be an intentional monument. Restoration is therefore the basic premise of the intentional monument. The character of the value of intentional memory, as a current value, is also expressed in the fact that it has always been protected from harmful intervention of human hands by legislation (p.42; authors translation).

So, if monuments contributed to the process of memorisation, the invention of the printed book started a new revolution by becoming a powerful vehicle of communication, a mobile object without geographical limitation, even if mute, like the stone tablets. The imagination, the suggested perceptions, the curiosity, and the memories of each reader in the comparative processes of their experiences, and the narratives, altogether trigger many and diverse kinds of navigation through the lines of text, much like a dive in the dark and stormy ocean of a painting by Turner or in a tranquil and shimmering mirror of water by Renoir. In these paintings, we find Immanuel Kant's definitions of night and day: "Night is sublime; day is beautiful" (Kant, 2020 [1763], p. 38)<sup>2</sup>. If in the words of a text we imagine the described acts which suggest well known to us or our perception of these images, in painting we imagine movement through the suggestion of static images.

From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards photography, and later cinema, expanded the perception of memory by simulating a historical time of recorded action in an approach to "simultaneous times" - that is, the time of the portrayed and the time of the observer. By "transporting"

Silberman and Purser (2012), is an interdisciplinary reading that draws on History, Archaeology, and Anthropology. These authors argue that the interpretation of heritage, and in particular the impact of heritage on contemporary society, are topics that require special attention in intervention programmes based on community values. They argue about the undeniable potential of various types of media in disseminating the value of cultural heritage in the current digital age (propelled into a possibly premature future with the pandemic), allowing to stimulate reflection and discussion about the importance of the collective memory of communities, about past, present and future identities. They also consider that inherited meanings and values are socially produced, i.e., are attributed by individuals and communities to cultural heritage, refocusing the importance of materiality on people. Therefore, we argue, it is these people who, in this digital context, will feel the absence of the sensorial experience of the spaces where hearing and smelling are not transposable to the virtual reality in which we have suddenly found ourselves, submerged in the last two years.

ourselves to the portrait context, which we never actually experienced, the capacity of accumulated knowledge between these two historical times - that is, the time of the image and the time of the observer - creates the illusion of a painting. In cinema, the register of images with sound transcends temporal and artificially the direct transmission. The illusion of time in movement, enhanced by the frames of a film, induces feeling of being carried inside those memories as a way of experiencing them and, in this way, apparently witnessing the event that triggered the memories in its real time.

In this context, theatre (since classical antiquity and through representation), aims to recreate ancient times as well, involving spectators in ambiances and atmospheres staged in such a way that it seems real to the spectators, especially through the performance of the actors, by activating spectators' emotions. Here, as in the experience of material heritage, what determines time is the action of people in their contexts. What outcomes from this process are the memories of the "actors" themselves, by defining and ranking memories in their significance, which they reveal in their following transmission, or omission, through direct speech.



Capuchin Convent in ruins, 2010.

**2** Regarding the time of day when, romantically, the past is best perceived, see Jukka Jokilehto's note on the difficulty, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, of preserving Rome's Colosseum from the intrusion of curious visitors who would like to follow Goethe's example (which we shall discuss later), and admire this monument in the moonlight (Jokilehto, 1999, p.85).



The intemporal landscape of the place with the Arabic toponym "Alferrara ", that means the place of the great olive trees, 2010.





*The beauty of the site, the pleasantness of the air, the abundance of water, the abundant vegetation, the paradisiacal fauna and flora and the splendor of an unobstructed landscape.*

(Serrão & Meco, 2007, pp. 290 - 291; authors translation)

It is therefore observed that the incessant search for technical means to reproduce certain socio-cultural contexts that occurred in the past acquires particular relevance when associated with human presence and its inherent living context. Architecture's capacity to constitute a temporal frame of enormous precision in historical contextualisation is well known, but its permanence beyond the short human life cycle elevates it to a timelessness that crosses the cultural cycles identified by aesthetic styles or movements. Architecture's historical identity makes itself stagnant as an aesthetic identity; however, this historical identity 'moves' in its timeless transit of use(s). It thus becomes clear that the measure of time will be that of the time lived by each human being in a given context and ambience, retained by each one, transforming itself into History at each new generational cycle.

When working with History as a document of memory, with the objective of proceeding to the conservation, to the reuse of buildings with particular or collective esteem resulting from its functionality and aesthetic identity, we try to integrate cycles of generational experiences. In this scope, probable successive adaptations, transformations, and or enlargements are inscribed, sometimes including even the signs of abandonment cycles and or rupture of the functional and compositional unit. What is sought in the process of conservation and reuse is to perceive the memories that are associated with these built structures and what persists as associable 'experiential atmospheres'. The questions that arise, however, are how to recognise them, how to look for them and where to look for them<sup>3</sup>.

>

Collapsing structures due to decay and vandalism: characterising the heritage resource, and identification of attributes that convey socio-cultural values, 2010.

**3** In the case of abandoned Convents, we start our gathering of information by the strategic structures and ancient systems that merged with the landscape, and compose the religious territorial unit such as fences, walls, paths, watersupply systems, gardens, orchards, etc.



# Rescuing and Reuse; Experience and Knowledge

Our process of rescuing<sup>4</sup> and reusing is established according to an intervention ethics guided by a methodological search for the valorisation of the inherited heritage and the memories that an historic building has provided (Ramos do Ó, 2011) and still provides<sup>5</sup>. This search requires the consultation of not only documents but essentially onsite observation in the spaces and respective ambiances, which are filtered by the time of use. In here, remaining records, potentially perceptible, are in harmony with the sense of architecture as a whole and in its functional relationships. The abstraction of the empty space will be found above all in the emptiness of the experiences, the sounds, the smells, the light variations that the intrinsic uses would imply in day and night periods.

As a starting point, the idea of artificial recreation of spatial contexts, and despite all the technologies available nowadays<sup>6</sup>, was not attractive to us. Our approach method comprises a process of deepening the functional interactions (programmatic matrix) and the corresponding spatialities (compositional matrix), where the three-dimensionality acquires relevance, particularly if associated to light sources and to the respective rituals and routines arising from the everyday life of the users. Ideally, we try to share the experiences and collect this information in direct speech or even, in the impossibility of dialoguing with local people, receive the information that was transmitted by those who experienced these spaces

**4** To rescue the Capuchin Convent from its ruined condition, a strategy planned for 25 years was designed as the result of a think tank. A body of consultant experts joined in 2010, that reflected, discussed, and established guidelines to address specific ethical and heritage problems found in place, guided by a discussion that also focused on the capuchin architecture (namely the guiding ideas and norms in the set out of conventual spaces and their functionalities). The coordination of this discussion group was conducted by the architect; it comprised the owner, a structural engineer, a stone expert, a landscape architect, a hydrology expert, an archaeologist, an art historian, and an expert on the history of monasticism. As an interdisciplinary team it provided a solid basis for raising awareness about the heritage value of the place, as well as highlighted the need to take informed decisions (rather than rushed ones), regarding the future of the place. The ruin state of conservation was taken as an opportunity to identify solutions for providing secure visiting paths, further ensuring this place would be protected and safeguarded from any more vandalism, while providing spaces for cultural and social use.

Then, when we observe a significant distance between the historical time that mediates 'the effective (and often affective) experience' and the historical time of 'effective knowledge emptiness', a feeling of loss is triggered by the absence of memories.

5 The continuous use by anonymous visitors who value this enchantment environment, was then visible in the trash laying on the floor, in the love declarations inscribed on the walls and in the stolen tiles. The security of this religious site needed therefore to be improved so that visitors could admire, feel and breathe the values in place, paying respect for the place, being open too nature, to the elements, it can still be a secure location, through minimal physical protection measures that would still allow people to walk about freely and safely.

6 We do not refute the capacities of digital technology as a potential working tool to bring to memory personal and collective pasts in heritage conservation, which traditionally uses the potential of drawings, films, photographs, magazines, interviews and diaries in the articulation of several practices of remembrance and, automatically, of forgetting. Moreover, the emphasis given to the process of valorisation by memory resulting from the interaction with heritage and not by the materiality itself, expressed in the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (UNESCO, 2003), paved the way for digital technologies to be facilitators of an understanding of cultural heritage as people-centred. Accordingly, in *Uses of Heritage*, Laurajane Smith considers that heritage should be understood as "not so much as a 'thing', but as a cultural and social process, which engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present" (Smith, 2006, p.2). However, and currently, we recognize the growing importance of the recent concept of the *Internet of Things* (IoT), which is changing the paradigm by the use of physical objects, whose sensors, processing capacity, software and or other technologies allow connecting and exchanging data with other devices and systems through the Internet, or other communication networks. In this context, the *thing* is not only the object in its materiality, but also a set of data, connections, and interactions (Giaccardi & Plate, 2016, p.70). Thus, the IoT has begun to change the traditional way of remembering since connected objects develop the ability to remember our lives, where we have been and what we have seen, heard and experienced. We are witnessing a radical shift where, instead of using things to communicate with other people, people communicate with *things* and *things* with people - and with other *things* (Giaccardi & Plate, 2016, p.70). Memory, as we remember today, has always drawn on things to aid it in remembering, influencing *what* to remember and *how* to remember. Nothing new, then. But, however, the construction of memory based on technologies (such as smartphones gradually replacing brain memory) has the potential to remove from the act of remembering the creative process in which memories are recreated each time they are evoked. Consequently, the IoT transforms the practices of remembering what we consider personally or socially significant, by selecting itself what is worth remembering. The space of memory and meaning transcends the capacity of human beings and is archived in physical objects, in *things*, allowing *more things* to be remembered, and in a different way regarding what human beings are capable of, and therefore, affecting how these memories are communicated. At the limit, these *things* question what is 'possible' and what is 'worth' remembering. The emerging ability of the Internet to connect objects that exist in the physical world to online databases, and to enable the collection, adaptation, and exchange of data about these material objects, shifts the storage of memory from the material world to the virtual world, limiting the experience of a set of traditional memory practices by which we make sense of the past in the present. New media will enable people to participate in the construction of cultural memory through online activities. Therefore, although practices in this environment - such as reconnecting and remembering together in a social network - move the arena of heritage discourse outside the narrow cycle of experts, we will still be far from this participatory and inclusive world in the practice of memory as a method of active and creative engagement with heritage.





The integrity of the ruined and abandoned cloister, the exterior space that connects the convent dependencies where the Capuchin friars lived, 2010.

In general, archaeological surveys uncover structures, exhume various objects and sometimes human remains, from which contextualizations are sought and interpretations are established within a framework of standardized values and procedures. In this context of archaeology, these testimonies of the past determine a comparative analytical referential of a certain period, whereas, in the context of interventions in buildings to be reused, the analytical process is placed differently: a broad spectrum of time is used in the valorisation of the experiences of a daily life with similarities to the contemporary one. In the last decade, Pompeii has aroused attention for the methodological innovation adopted in the archaeological works, developed by the Italian archaeologist Massimo Osanna<sup>7</sup>. It stands out the scientific approach developed which considered the objects as the starting point of research, as for example the case of the “talking vases” discovered in a temple outside the urban nucleus. In terms of meaning, these vases might have some similarity with contemporary *ex-votos*, as they share the same purpose in the sense that an offering is given to a divinity as a promise or in thanksgiving for the fulfilment of a request. These vases, with the identification of their donor, are interpreted beyond their materiality, as Massimo Osanna (2021) reports:

It is difficult to go back to a rhythm without having participated in it, to reconstruct the significant process of sensory elaboration that must have involved sight, touch and smell: emotional experiences no longer recoverable by us. However, archaeological data can help us at least to imagine segments of ritual activity, especially if today we interrogate ancient artefacts again through new technologies: the exact sciences allow us to rewrite the history of gestures and the biography of objects (p.75; authors translation).

This way of pursuing an articulation of the meaning of objects, not just in space but also in their close connection with the context of use beyond the strictly practical, and further considering the potential of new technologies for the understanding of socio-cultural practices<sup>8</sup>, raises the perception of the historical time of these objects. In this time, the place of actions converges, not merely framed by the geometric location of the actions themselves but also framed by their meaning as an essential element of a chain of wills and of behaviours intrinsic to the local culture. The same author reinforces that "to understand the rite, all the traces, visible and invisible, that archaeology has given to those who investigate the terrain with attention and passion must be collected" (Osanna, 2021, p.75; authors translation). This understanding will transcend archaeology and its process of exhumation, research, and interpretation.

Learning from this experience, it is our believe that the regeneration of architecture, in general and of spatialities in particular, should be scrutinised through a similar process, especially when we are in the presence of realities that have suffered the decline of their functional essence, of their accumulative experiences. The violence of abandonment, degradation, and vandalism among other factors of de-characterization and deleting of the meanings for which they were erected, are themselves understood in their time and in their actions as vital registers for the regeneration process. The buildings keep perceptible and imperceptible memories of extreme relevance for the processes of conservation, rescuing or functional regeneration.

**7** Between 2014 and 2020 Massimo Osanna has been the Director of the Archaeological Park of Pompeii.

**8** In this context, the fragility of the original Pompeii objects benefited from a new technology in which images obtained by specific digitizers allowed to create 3D reconstructions, namely of the found bodies, providing new knowledge of this ancient city inhabitants.

The design approach that we follow apart us from the exclusive approach of the regeneration of materiality as a value in itself, as an exclusive objective in the scope of its conservation, rescuing and valorisation in, and for, the contemporaneity. We acknowledge, however, the relevance and objective consideration of this approach at the level of materiality, but not its exclusivity as the trigger of design thought. We consider that when material memories are in place they acquire cultural relevance, as they are the caretakers of the generational memories of the place, direct and indirect. The buildings became containers of experiences, that humans with all their senses attributed meaning to. The sense of harmony, scale, proportion, and comfort provided by those spaces is only valued by the acts of human fruition that occurred in that place. The cultural memory of these spaces will therefore be inseparable from those who enjoyed them, individually or collectively.

In this way we seek to go beyond the museum narrative of the History of Architecture. Prisoner of History, the time of these old buildings with technical and cultural regenerative capacities and potentialities, seems to be conditioned by strict disciplinary readings that tend to guide them to musealization, preventing these ancient places from being again experienced by daily life, potentially acquiring by new uses. The argument in certain heritage safeguarding debates, that experiencing heritage places as a cultural and sometimes material value, is an obstacle to its permanence, is not new. The dehumanization of heritage, that is, the removal of primal human activity from certain buildings, readapted for non-permanent uses, has been a current practice showing different degrees of intensity. Such an attitude removes the meaning of their existence, or at least of part of it, depending on the new functionalities introduced. Naturally, social, and political changes, among others, are determining factors for these functional alterations, i.e., as the saying goes, *Without a King, the Throne Room is meaningless*. But what is at stake is not the exceptions, but precisely the invariants whose current typologies are a significant part of the identity of various types of buildings that are being purged of memory. In the process of reuse, or even

with a change of use, the disregard of the experiences *in-situ*, i.e., in the spatial and functional contexts of where the building is set, will culturally impoverish the places. Therefore, it is our strong believe that experiences may not be omitted or considered irrelevant in the process of developing an intervention strategy for these places.



The unmovable artistic assets belonging to the historical masonry building: frescoes, tiles, and stuccoes, 2010.













Main facade and Nave of the Convent Church:  
details of decorative, spiritual and symbolic elements,  
2010



>  
North Transept with collapse of the discharge  
arch of the door, 2010.





"Facade facing South and side houses with the same front (c. 1840-1897)".  
In Setúbal District Archive - DigitArq (PT/ADSTB/PSS/APAC/A/0053).

# Cultural Memory

The cultural memory<sup>9</sup>, resulting from heritage values in place, does not always match the historical memory where, in a certain way, a specific time materialized by museum discourses has been crystallized. This possibility of unmatching memories relies on the existence of a gap between both, that is, in neither of them memory is considered as the result of effective experiences. In these circumstances, it is observed the use of frames in dominant socio-political and cultural contexts where, subliminally, a discourse sustained on the artistic and/or stylistic side is maintained. Regarding experiential memories, it accentuates the idea of 'neutrality by omission'.

To characterize a certain building with public esteem, or with a certain interest, we observe and try to establish bounded relations that allow us to amplify perceptions in frameworks that go beyond the aesthetic dimension. Similarly, when the examples we observe are mostly hybrids, we try to establish distinct visions of discourses by building up from hierarchies, or categories, that are exclusively aesthetic (in the sense that their supposed discursive interdependence is standardized by examples established by erudite historiography). What happens in a substantial part of the interventions is that the supposed cause-effect transmission in the value chain - that historiography registered as identity, authentic, and which determine a standardized methodology of exclusively material heritage valuation, is not conjugated with the material values.

When we observe the buildings in a significant level of degradation - for e.g., after their abandonment and consequent exposure of the materials, techniques and technologies to the weather -, we see 'impure' realities, in the sense that they do not fit into the constructive canon attributed to a particular style or period. We can also remark that some of the spatial-functional and volumetric-formal presuppositions have not been applied, as it may be perceived that intuitive approximations to a determined model were used and

**9** On the importance of Cultural Memory, Paul Connerton observes: "People are not the only things that disappear. The material culture of past lives does too. Indeed, it disappears more rapidly as the value attached to it diminishes" (2006, p. 316).

not a process of canonical transposition. It therefore may be said that they resulted from adaptations and interpretations imposed by specific factors such as economic resources, available materials and technologies, and by potential processes of cultural hybridization.

Even in the case of non-monumental buildings, integrated in a chain of standardized procedures, it may be observed that the geographies in which they are built impose the appearance of variants and sometimes a simplification that recharacterizes these buildings in their dimension and materiality. In all these criteria of characterisation, the anthropological condition of their users will be associated, i.e., of those who have directly and indirectly participated in these hybridisations. This reality is an inseparable part of the analysis we make in terms of the design approach in the scope of the intervention in historic buildings, independently of their formal heritage status. An abstract sense of place is thus substantiated as living spaces, ambiances that have determined constant uses in daily life, inscribing scales, and functional optimizations inherent to those experiences that configure affective spaces of emotions and, consequently, of memories.

When the materiality and inherent use are extinguished, it is the very sense of architecture that disintegrates and falls into ruin. Even if the whole or part of the building persists and that part retains its aesthetic identity, the emptiness of the experiences extinguishes defeats the reason for its existence. The sense of ruin, even before such building is considered a ruin in material terms, is perceptible through the disintegration of use, that is, through the fact that architecture is not being fulfilled in its entirety. The artificialization of the architecture, or of its ruin, as the "museum of the void" to which it was relegated, after being deactivated (if that is its condition) will mean more than its transformation: it will mean acceptance, it will mean the permanence of architecture beyond itself as a mere functional objective. Provided that the intervention criteria are met according to the stated standards, guiding documents - such as heritage charters and recommendations and good practices in heritage intervention - this prerogative of *museum of the void* has tended to normalise. However, for the salvation of memory, these premises reveal an apparent difficulty in keeping united the intangible value that these buildings acquired throughout their uses, conferred by successive generations of users.

We consider that the regeneration of a building for a new use will not depend exclusively on the provision of technical conditions, or

the preservation of the most relevant elements of its identity. Rather, it will depend substantially on the possibility that its salvation does not extinguish the matrix base for which it was conceived. This may be achieved by considering the successive cycles of programmatic experiences whose practices configured the spaces and by creating atmospheres that confirm architecture as a global composition.

In most cases, the impossibility of perceiving the experiences and their generational memories, gives rise to their transmutation into historical memories, and consequently, these memories gain an association with an aesthetic referential, an artistic ideal, be it erudite, traditional, or even vernacular. Reading the *space of time*, as a philosophical concept or as an allegory prefigures itself as a representation of a historical time that occurred in a certain space that remained in the present day, virtualizing it in its ancestral use, in the expectation that we will perceive senses of daily use, i.e., communicational movements between spaces

**10** The usefulness of 3D documentation, on reconstitution in virtual environments of destroyed, hidden or in danger of ruin material assets, is unquestionable. However, we believe that nothing replaces the stimulating on-site experience, individual or collective, in order for a better understanding of events lived in the past, in the attribution of meaning to the present, and in the projection of a future reality. We argue that this experience - which values prospective meanings based on retrospective values - will create memories and will contribute to a sense of identity, sharing and belonging. The 'new heritage', built from the conventional heritage, will be that which is produced digitally with emerging technologies, by offering a meeting space for an interactive practice of 'remembering together'. The publication of memories in social networks, and the responses to those memories reveal diverse understandings and interests about a moment in history, about a monument, about a place, about an object. These memories and the collective identities of groups of people who meet in the virtual space, will result in descriptive narratives about historical events, about perceptions of the material traces of the past - objects, spaces and their use - configuring the remembrance as a social process. As Lowenthal (2005) noted, the social construction of heritage is found in the context of everyday life. However, a new era of information and communication technologies characterized by participatory and socially-based activities, which use personal memory devices (such as the aforementioned smartphones), alters and transforms the traditional set of social practices that interweave memories and material traces to give meaning and significance in the present to lived realities of our past, and in this sense, 'doing' or 'saying' about an object becomes more important for the memory process than the object itself (Giaccardi & Plate, 2016). Moreover, with the ongoing technological development, Giaccardi (2012) highlights that:

the list of services and websites supporting the production and distribution of digital content has no end (...) Additionally, with the spread of iPhone, Android and BlackBerry smartphones, which combine the functions of a mobile phone with that of a small personal computer, and with other high-end mobile devices such as Apple iPod Touch and iPad, or Amazon Kindle (just to name the most well known today), social media are increasingly becoming mobile (p.4).

Laurajane Smith in *Uses of Heritage* (2006) and in subsequent works argues that heritage is increasingly defined by the cultural work of ordinary people rather than by official organizations, since it results from ongoing interactions in the real world, by ordinary people, who keep alive the traditions and practices of use, that in the end give meaning to heritage. This perspective gives a kind of power to ordinary citizens who thus feel confident that by practising memory by digital means and through social media, their voice will have an impact on decisions about physical interventions in heritage. By gaining a right to heritage, it is fulfilled the definition of heritage foreshadowed in the *Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* (Council of Europe, 2005).



and actions. This concept is beyond the idea of imagined spectres or programmed holograms<sup>10</sup>, as it is beyond of a need to associate an integration of literary or architectural citations to justify this type of approach to intervention in the historic built environment.

Actually, what we seek to achieve in the architectural approach is the understanding of spaces, since its original layout to the actual "route of use", where all kinds of changes are inscribed over time. We seek to associate the material records of these experiences and changes - marked on floors, walls, and ceilings, in architectural, artistic, and structural notes, as well as in spatialities and not mere compartments - to three-dimensional spaces that are influent and influence their use. We seek to understand the atmospheres that persist in order to better respond to the salvation of the memories. We understand these atmospheres as the light of time that has shaped the identity of the place and that have accommodated themselves to the surfaces of architecture as transparent matter, that is, perceived but not seen. This perception has its direct expression in the light, as its absence extinguishes its presence, in the same way as the spaces without experiences are extinct in terms of meaning, due to the absence of sensorial atmospheres.

The reconfiguration of a ruin or the reuse of a building is beyond the physical intervention, where the knowledge and interpretation of previous experiences may participate in the heritage identity, mitigating the intervention of affecting its character. To diminish eventual losses and enhancing the possibility of resumption of previous uses and respective atmospheres, we consider the reversibility of the interventions as the most appropriate and effective option in mitigating the possibility of extinction of the original identity.

In terms of materials, techniques and technologies, the interventions should be articulated with the architectural strategy, avoiding that they are disconnected from historical times, and above all from memories, those that transmit and give a humanist sense to places. As previously mentioned, the present time is responsible for the memories it inherits and simultaneously for those it transmits, increasing the sensorial aptitude about the (re)creations that may be proposed<sup>11</sup>.

The contemporary architecture that interferes with the sense of place, with the sensory capacity that emanates from that place, alters the atmospheres, removes the light of time, wipes out the subtle transparent shine on the surfaces, and accentuates the process of cultural disintegration. The process occurs by dismembering the physical context from the immaterial, by not perceiving their



Landscape context of the Convent fence, 2010.

**11** Currently, the real and sensorial world enhances the memories inherited from the past. Yet, parallel to this universe there is another world, in exponential growth, where memories accumulate and are processed in a technological way: the metaverse. The term, which appeared at the end of the 1990s, refers to an infinite possibility of parallel universes, in virtual reality environments by means of augmented reality (AR) and or virtual reality (VR), three-dimensional, online and immersive, where interaction with other users in social, work and or entertainment activities, such as participating in cultural events, takes place in an artificial world. The user's visual experience can be further complemented by sound and other sensory interaction capabilities enabling virtual interaction in a space where the digital and physical universes converge. By autumn 2021, by renaming *Facebook* © to *Meta* © (indicating a positioning beyond material reality), Mark Zuckerberg would have relaunched the massive use of the internet as *the* social environment of interaction between people, consciously distinct from the conventional, concrete universe. And it will be in this *space* of the virtual reality experience, in this growing metaverse that we access through the internet and whose definition is constantly being updated, that perceptions of 'virtual presence' will contribute to the creation of new memories, new remembrances and new meanings.

interrelation. The excess of light on surfaces, as Tanizaki (1999 [1933]) states, annuls light itself, since, in its essence, light is the revealing and guardian of an ancestral atmosphere. Tanizaki established relationships between everyday contexts, considered as material expressions, and the experiences there developed, revealing their interdependence in the ancestral process of identity and cultural memory. His field of study was mainly related to the traditional Japanese house as a habitat, configured according to the rituals of domestic and spiritual life, converging in a transcendent dimension. Referring to the symbolic power of this culture, Tanizaki (1999 [1933]) writes:

But what we call the beautiful is usually no more than a sublimation of the realities of life, and it was thus that our ancestors, forced to live whether they wanted to or not in dark rooms, one day discovered beauty in the midst of shadow, and soon used shadow to aesthetic effect (p.31; authors translation).

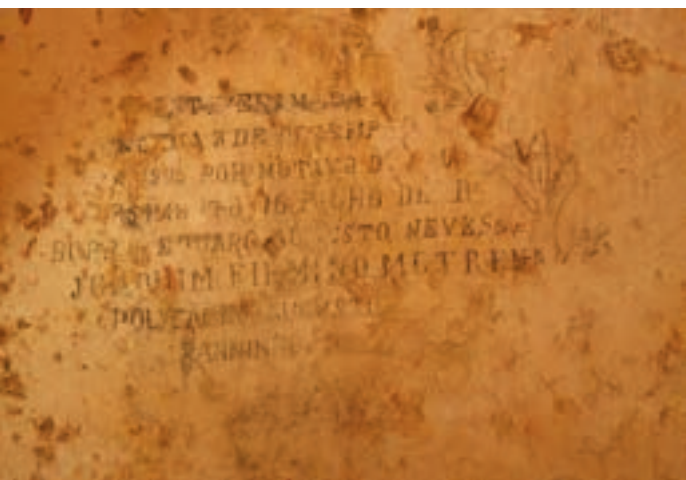
Emphasising this reality, the author reveals the existence of a niche in the wall of the living room of these houses which, despite being able to receive a floral ornament or a painting, actually its function "is not decorative in itself, since it is more a question of adding a dimension of depth to the shadow" (Tanizaki, 1999 [1933], p.32; authors translation). This example is paradigmatic for us to understand that the questions related to the restoration and/or regeneration of buildings and their respective spatialities, go beyond a simple recognition of materials, technologies, states of conservation and stylistic framework. As the shadow reflects the time (Mestre & Aleixo, 2017a), it should be acknowledged.

In this context, the interposition of new architectures in pre-existences, if autonomous from cultural contexts, tends to silence the historical time of experiences and annul memories as potential vectors of conciliation. The relevance of these vectors allows us to reconcile physical memories imprinted on structures, as archaeology in architecture, and the atmospheres associated with them. More than preserving physical records, we intend to reveal the interjections that the abandoned spaces suggest to us, not only in their condition of voids of actions, but also as frames of memories. Whenever possible, we try to listen to those who experienced these spaces, since they may reveal their memories, describing sensorial emotions. Through these testimonies, it is possible to question the spaces, through conjugated perceptions between materiality and immateriality.



Damp and decay in the cloister access, 2010.

The abstraction of the void, the uncertainty regarding the use of the spaces, and the recalled memories about them, relate to the idea of capturing the essence of these places once lived. The spaces use and the recalled memories of events in these spaces are variants that we, metaphorically, intend to integrate in a heritage intervention. The aim is to capture temporal fragments by enhancing the pre-existing spatial atmospheres, mediated by the luminous densities and transparencies that contain the fractions of time of the emotions generated in the spaces. The subtle chromaticisms of the light spectrum and their reflections on the surfaces provide, and sometimes reveal, perceptions of scale, proportion and harmony that have repercussions on the emotions of those who experience these spaces once again



Pilgrimage memories in the place:  
pencil registers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>  
century visitors, 2010.



# Alferrara: process of salvation

Now we take the case of the Capuchins Convent of Alferrara, in Setúbal (Mestre & Aleixo, 2015), in its condition of visitable ruin<sup>12</sup>. When we walk through it at nightfall on an autumn day, the light that pierces the grilles of the main facade window projects into the interior of the nave through luminous filaments, which release from the darkness fragments of cultural identity, accentuated by the recreational atmosphere of the place. Its muteness is as great as the impossibility to communicate with former users. For this reason, it was only possible to reinforce the perceptions of a reflective space.

A set of inscriptions from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, written in pencil by spontaneous visitors, remain on some walls<sup>13</sup>. These reveal the curiosity and simultaneously the appreciation of this ruin, as if revalidating its importance as a place of pilgrimage, transformed into a place of visitation. By their own hand, these outsiders left for future memory the record of their *tour* to this place, as a specifically chosen visit. These testimonies contribute to the understanding of the process of abandonment and ruin of the Convent, over a significant period of time, probably even before the extinction of the religious orders in Portugal under the General Ecclesiastical Reform in 1834, due to the damage caused by the French invasions (Aleixo & Mestre, 2020). These records also allow the perception of an identity in transition, where the temporal fragmentation results from the combination of the abandonment of the ancestral use and the respective physical degradation. Absorbed by the endemic vegetation, its rediscovery in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century will have resulted from the curiosity aroused by the mysterious context of the mountain range of the *Gaiteiros*, awakening the desire to experience the ruin and the spaces populated by visitors' imagination. These memories, namely the inscription here

**12** According to the vmsa architects project (2010), strategic measures were implemented on site in order to preserve the resilience and robustness of the existing building structures, to reduce access vulnerability, security of visitors and to enable sociocultural activities on site: wooden structures were fit into spaces, waterproofing materials were placed on rooftops; a secure circuit was outlined, below the structures; openings were closed, by strategically placing perforated concrete blocks in windows controlling the light, fitting gates and railings to doors avoiding unwanted access to the site and preventing the recurring vandalism. These protective measures, are temporary and easily removable and may be removed when the future decides how to intervene in the whole Convent.

**13** To this day, hikers and mountain bikers register the abandonment of this place in their blogs.

translated, "On 18<sup>th</sup> February 1908 the *Esparteiro* Family - *Maria Hermínia da Silva, Silvia Augusta da Silva, ...* - were here", representing events and sometimes emotions in the first person, are integrated in the salvation process as inherent to real memories.

The visitation of travellers, renewed generation after generation, to this landscape and heritage context, has in Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) an illustrious representative, who was in Portugal from May 6<sup>th</sup> to August 14<sup>th</sup>, in 1866. When he decides to visit Portugal, at the age of 61, he is invited by the O'Neill family, who he has met previously in Copenhagen. The Danish writer travelled "taking a steamer from Lisbon to the Southside of Rio Tejo, where he again takes the railroad to Setubal" (Pascoal, 2019, p. 39) and, with the O'Neill family, went through the mountains to visit the ruined houses and convents of Alferrara, St. Paul and Capuchins<sup>14</sup>. In one of Andersens' travel descriptions there is a reference to the ruined convent of the Capuchins: "we visited a small, abandoned monastery on the slopes of Palmela mountain and galloped to the castle itself" (Andersen, 1984 [1878], p.53), corroborating Pascoal assertion that "travel narratives pay a special attention to space" (2019, p.44).

This is the time of influence of the German poet's *Voyage to Italy* (Goethe, 2001 [1816]), published almost four decades after the journey that took place between 1786-1788. Goethe's (1749-1832) notes are the referential basis of the most influential literary text of travel literature. Curiously, this type of narrative became a pioneering process of knowledge and dissemination of heritage in exploratory contexts of the unknown, sometimes as exciting adventurous journeys, but above all as a process of revealing other cultures, religions, expressions and ways of life.

Curiously, contradictory feelings emerge in these accounts regarding the differences found in these places, not only in material look and expressions, but also in customs, way of dressing and communicating, among other aspects. Some records of this travel literature reveal identical attitudes and behaviours. Despite occurring in different latitudes and contexts, the same ambition to perpetuate their memory in special places is observed.

**14** There are references on the acquisition of the Alferrara Convents, this Capuchin Convent, and the nearby Convent of St. Paul, by Henrique O'Neill.



Degradation of the circulation and transitional spaces: destruction caused by time of abandonment and damage caused by contemporary visitors, who marked their presence with intrusive and difficult to remove coating, in tags and graffiti, 2010.



The Church Nave and the main entrance, 2010.





Vault of the main altar with visible frescoes, 2010.



Robert Byron (1905-1941), a British travel writer, in his book *The Road to Oxiana* records something very similar to the writing on the walls of the Capuchins Convent, when he describes that a Mr. Hyde had engraved his name in 1821, and that he and his traveller companions had arrived just in time to prevent their Indian driver from doing the same (Byron, 2014/[1937], p. 225). With this comment, defacing the monuments brings awareness to these records. This is an ancestral practice, with special relevance in classical antiquity, such as the engravings on the Baths of Pompei. In many cases they reveal social protest, signalling opinions and states of mind of particular times and moments in individual and collective terms, constituting a unique cultural memory.



^ Refectory: remains of collapsed ceiling with frescoes; Cloister

>

Remaining fragments of tiles, 2010.



## CULTURE AND MEMORY: A TESTIMONY

The proposed rescuing of the Capuchin Convent<sup>15</sup>, as a liberation from a weak state of conservation inducing the disappearance of a physical reality and cultural memories, is based on a non-physical reconstruction concept, but rather on its reuse as a space of memory, where this long process of deactivation and degradation constitutes the cultural matrix of preservation itself. In terms of the intervention matrix, we revisit the theoretical and practical thoughts of the Italian architect Raffaele Stern (1774-1820) and his pioneering intervention in the Colosseum of Rome under the tutelage of the visionary Pope Pius VII. This Pope determined that the Vatican would take over the guardianship of the ancient monuments, under the direction of Stern, from which we highlight, in addition to the Colosseum, the Arch of Titus and the new wing of the Chiaramonti Museum.

In Stern's interventions in these monuments, the concept of "critical restoration" was applied as a method to safeguard architectural memories for future generations, an option that remains contemporary in its philosophical principles. The restoration of the Colosseum in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century incorporates structural consolidation as a cultural process, distinguishing the intervention with the new materiality of the bricks, but using volumetric continuity, i.e., by filling the openings and voids with this material and incorporating the cracks as testimonies of degradation.

**15** The convent of the Capuchin Franciscans of the Order of Modern Observants of São Francisco de Alferrara was founded in 1578, by commission of *D. Estêvão da Gama*, son of the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama. Considering building a Convent in this location to be a service to God and for the benefit of the Catholic religion, *D. Estêvão da Gama* offers the land, in the then named *Quinta da Boa Vista*, an offer accepted by the Order in 1576. In 1600, the original architecture is firstly expanded to house 20 monks, and in 1639 it underwent profound changes to its organization. Other interventions date from 1712, with the introduction of a new refectory and, in 1719, the entire building underwent a general repair. Badly affected by the 1755 earthquake, it undergoes a new intervention and remains in service until 1833, when the religious community counted with only 4 monks. In 1834, the site was sold at a public auction, followed by a period of vandalism and looting that lasted until the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 1986 the Association of Municipalities of the Setúbal Region (AMRS) bought the convent and in June 2010 hired vmsa architects. In summary, the following was then observed in the Capuchin Convent: the existence of phenomena of imminent collapse; an evolutionary and accelerated state of degradation with landslides and severe cracking in walls and vaults; a slow and natural appropriation by nature, the origin of several anomalies observed in construction; the widespread degradation of hydraulic structures; and the dilapidation of the heritage with obvious traces of theft of tiles and stonework, as well as an immensity of graffiti in an affirmation of vandalism of the sacred space. This context of an uncertain future, contributed to the aim to preserve memories an identity, to re-establish feeling of place and belonging, influencing the way we researched and reflected on heritage today.

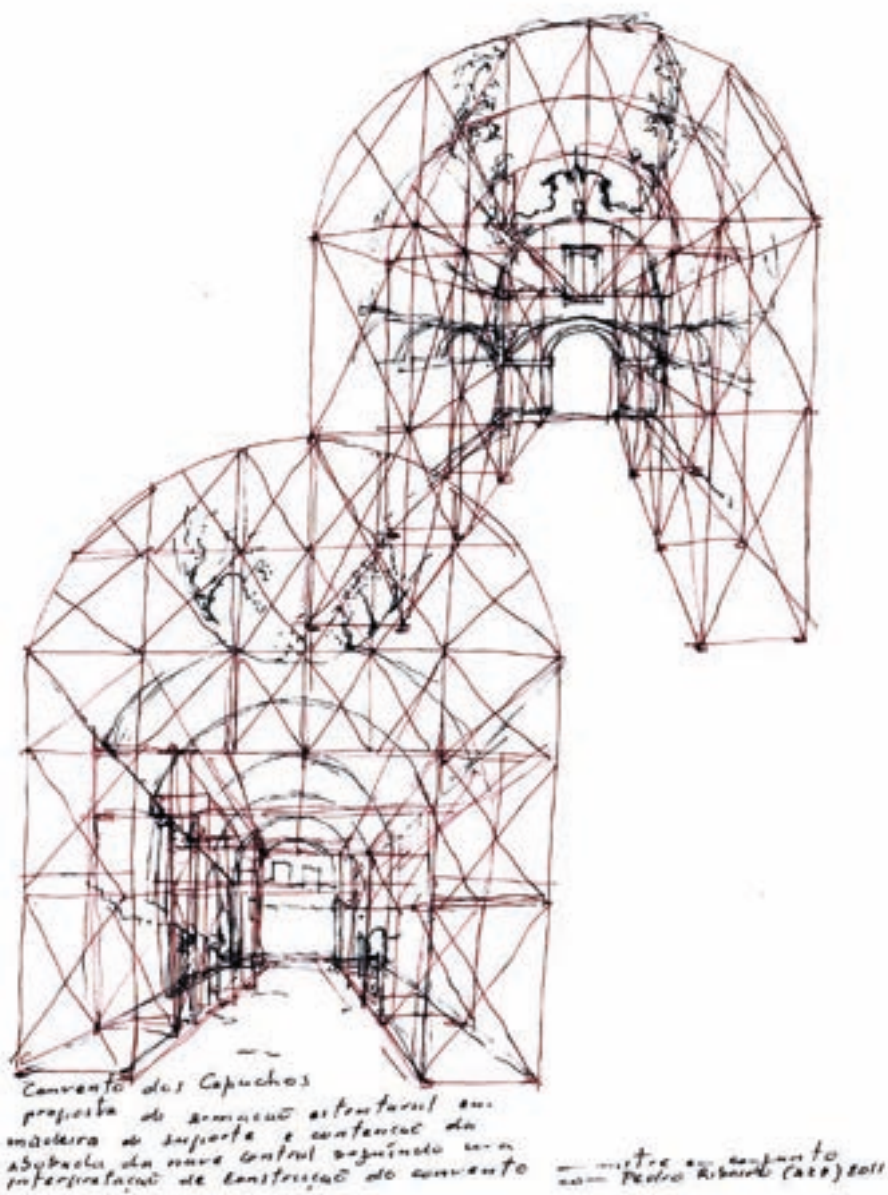
In contrast to the intervention by Stern, who considered the incorporation of all the elements present to be fundamental to the intervention purpose, and a refusal to reconstruct the architectural expression, another vision emerged, that of Italian architect Giuseppe Valadier (1762-1839), who assumed the continuation of the restoration work. Faced with the instability observed in 1820, Valadier designed a temporary wooden structure, which remained in place for 3 years until consolidation work began. The work envisaged the reconstruction of parts of the Colosseum as a process of structural stabilisation and philosophical attitude, reconstructing forms, and artistic expressions, using travertine in situations where stability required a resistant material, and exposed brick, in order to facilitate the continuation and total reconstruction of the monument<sup>16</sup>. Interestingly both intervened in this monument, each in its pre-collapse section, Stern in the eastern buttress and Valadier on the opposite side<sup>17</sup>, expressing their position regarding the reconstruction<sup>18</sup>.

**16** The volumetric reconstruction of the buttress, is described by Valadier himself in 1833, quoted by Jokilehto (1999):

(...) imitating the old in every little part, except that the Monument is entirely of travertine, and the new work, in order to obtain the possible economy, has only half the height of the first pillars, the impositions of the arches, the bases of the columns and their respective capitals, and the last member of the cornices, so that they are more stable. All the rest is of brick, with which the ancient mouldings have been faithfully imitated, and having given it a general patina in fresco, imitating antiquity, it seems to be made of travertine in its entirety (1999, p.99, note 30).

**17** Giorgio Grassi (2003) talks through Stern's and Valadier's different reconstruction approaches: (...) that of the eastern buttress, by Stern (1806), not for its functional character, which is irrelevant, but for its radicality, for the cultural expressiveness of its way of being there, of intervening, of distancing itself, of showing two opposing worlds and, in this opposition, the unrepeatable character of the original solution. And then Valadier's approach to the western buttress (1820), a more sophisticated and complex response, in which the direct confrontation with the old comes into play, perhaps legitimised for the last time (...) Together, these two examples clearly show us the limits of architecture (how it could no longer be and how it could have been), i.e., the unity of the experience of architecture in time, together with its inescapable historicity. In reality, all the good that comes after will be nothing more than the result of explaining the lesson provided by these two examples (however we must not forget that Stern and Valadier were two great architects and therein lies the difference between a good restoration and a bad one) (p. 152; authors translation).

**18** The importance of memory in ascribing meaning and, in conservation, contributing to the definition of intervention methodologies, is undeniable. Memory has the ability to position us in the past, record the present and enhance the future. Materiality triggers the memory, the feelings that are inherent to seeing or touching a material object. It will be for these reasons that the material dimension of memory in architecture will appeal to reconstitution. And it will also be because of this dimension that exploiting the potential of digital technologies to reconstruct collective memories in the dimensions of space, community and individual identity will allow the constant adaptation of the understanding of a monument in the light of developing knowledge, without affecting the material culture in presence (Silberman & Purser, 2012)



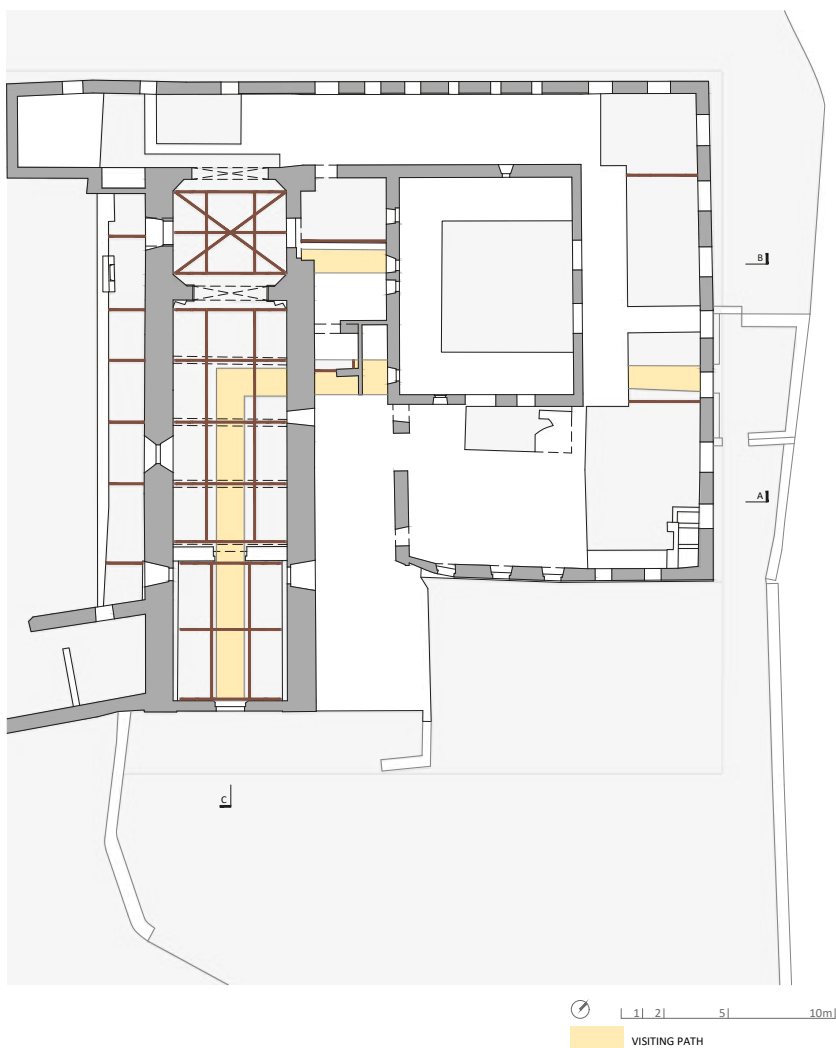
[Embracing technical aspects of construction history]: "Proposal for a structural timber framework for support and containment of the vault of the central nave, according to an interpretation of the original construction of the Convent, with Pedro Ribeiro (AZP)". Written drawing by Victor Mestre, 2011.



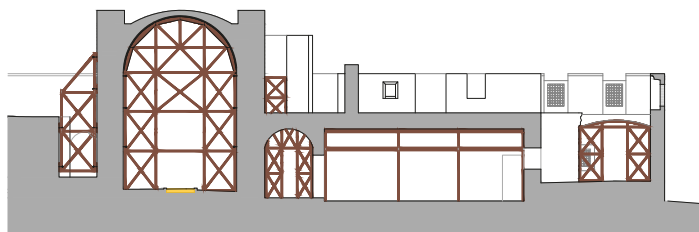
#### Level 0 Plan:

Timber framed structure, enclosure of windows, visiting path and gates.





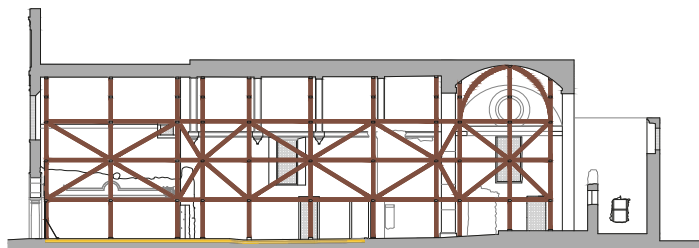
**Level 1 Plan:**  
Timber framed structure and enclosure of windows.



SECTION A



SECTION B



SECTION C

— VISITING PATH

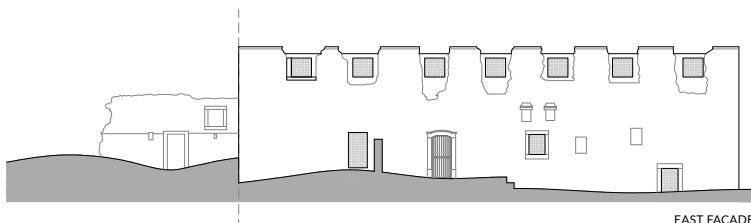


1 2 5 10m

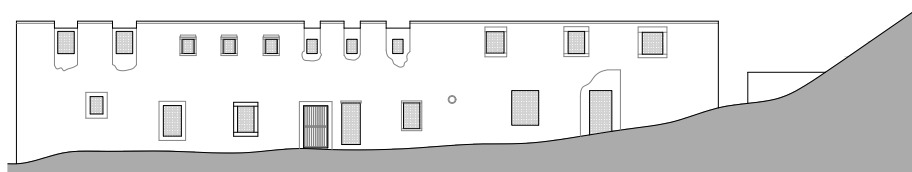
Sections, showing the use of timber framed structures for structural stabilization.



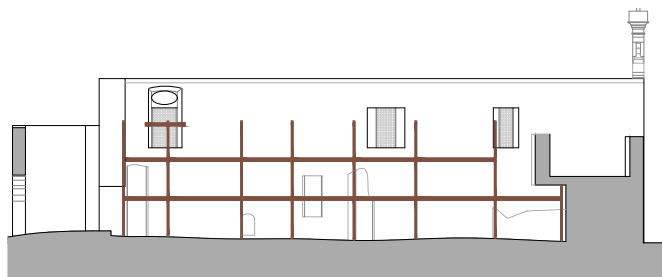
SOUTH FACADE



EAST FACADE

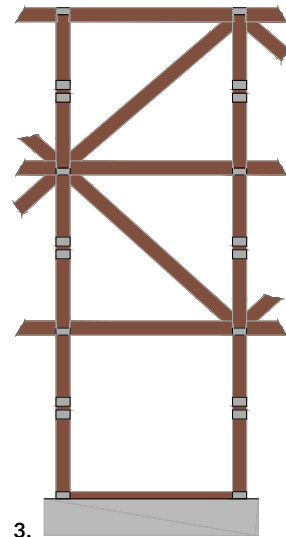
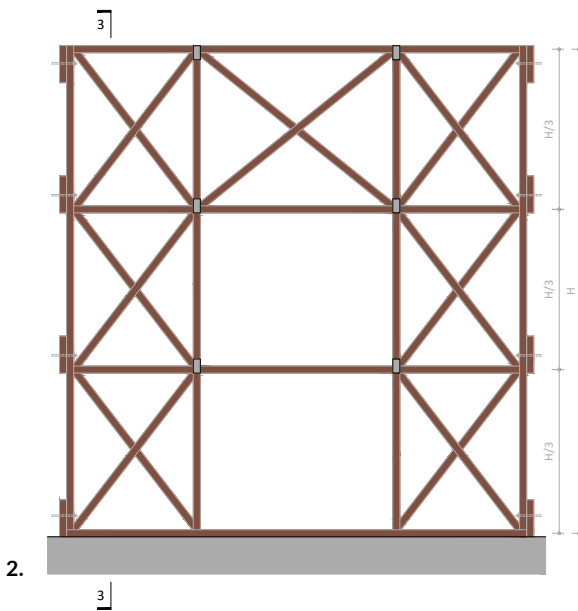
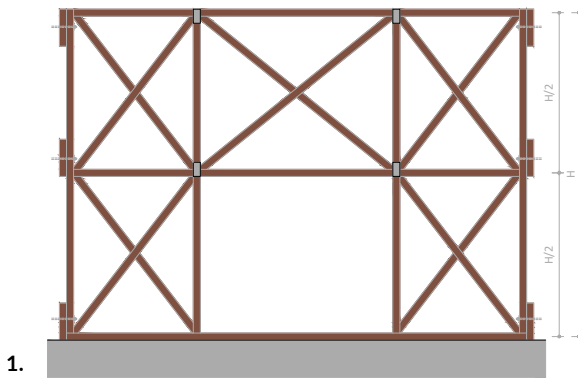


NORTH FACADE



WEST FACADE

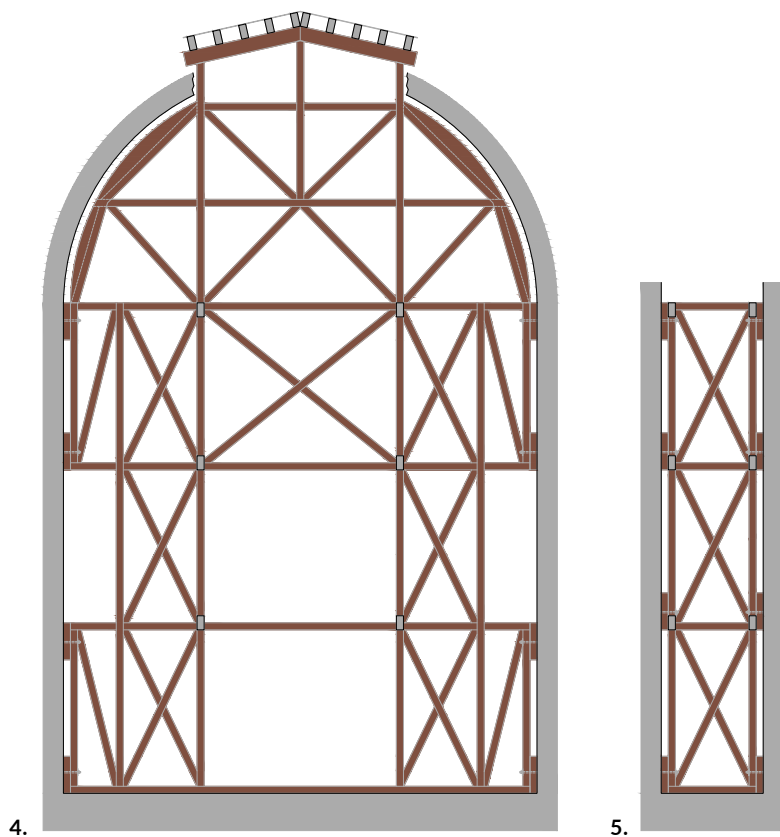
Facades, showing the use of concrete blocks applied in windows for structural stabilization.



0.5 | 1 | 2m

Structural framework with 0.08 x 0.16m wooden beams: interlock systems for different space heights (H):

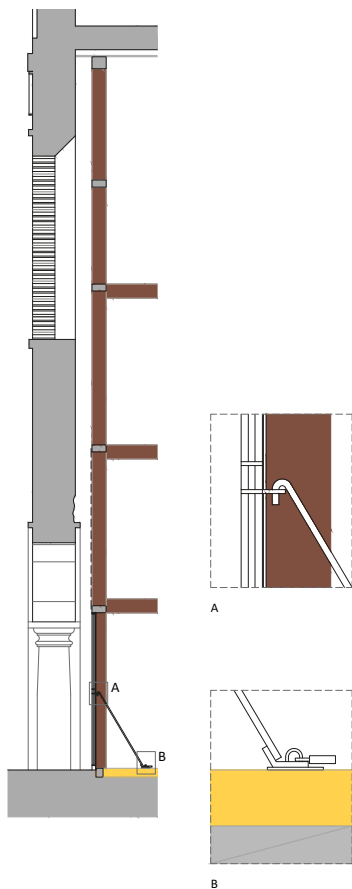
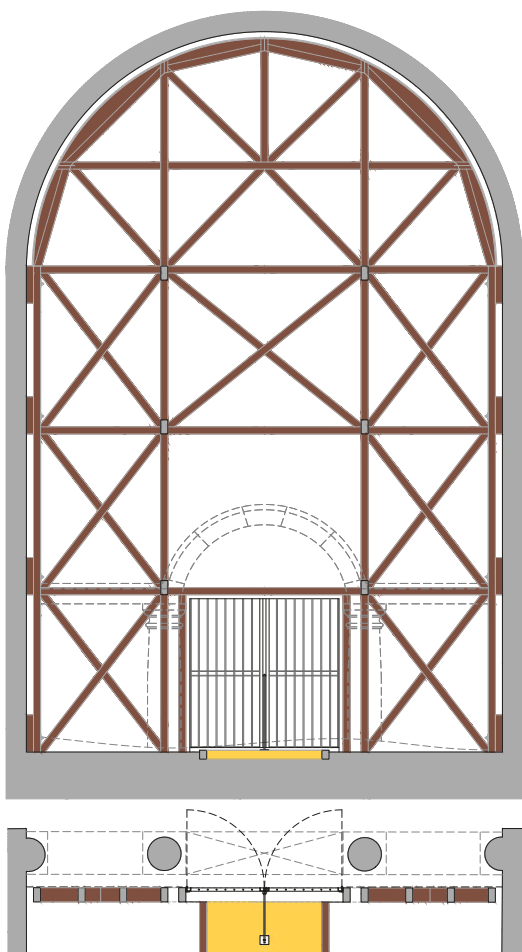
1. Section parallel to main facade, with  $H \leq 3.50\text{m}$
2. Section parallel to main facade, with  $H > 3.50\text{m}$
3. Section perpendicular to main facade: structural longitudinal interlock



Structural framework with 0.08 x 0.16m wooden beams:

- 4. Section parallel to main facade through Church dome
- 5. Section parallel to main facade, West and lateral spaces interlock section

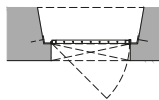
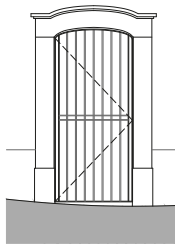
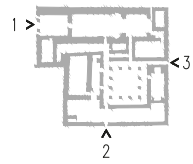




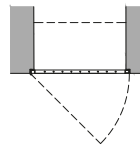
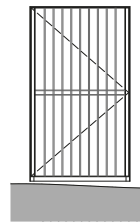
GATE 1 : DETAILS A AND B



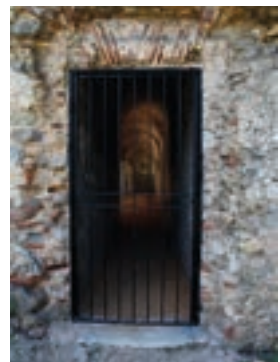
Mitigating vandalism and ensuring place security: ironwork design and fitting of gates.

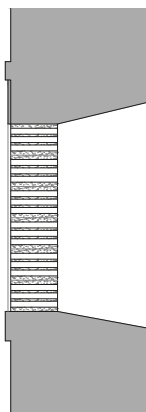


GATE 2

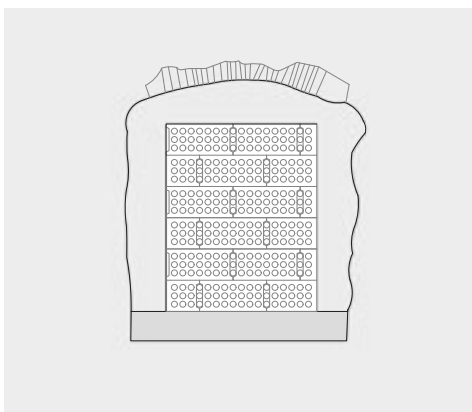


GATE 3

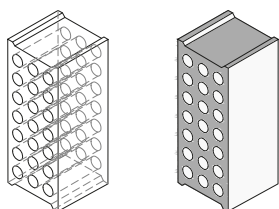




SECTION



FRONT VIEW



CONCRETE BLOCK 500X200X200mm [Ø40mm]



0.2 | 0.5 | 1m

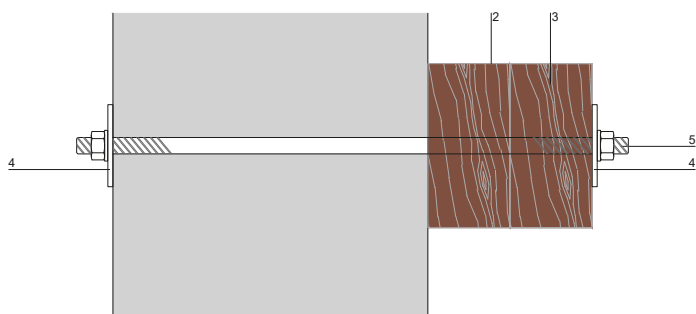
Structural homogenization of walls and openings with the reconstruction of gaps to embrace new closing elements: concrete blocks.



Ensuring place security, natural ventilation and the mystic of light: the use of a perforated concrete block that performs as coloured "stained glass".



# TIMBER FRAME: JOINT DETAIL



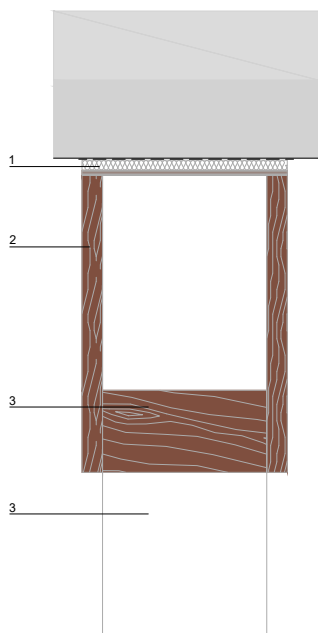
1. Geotextile Drainage Matting; Polystyrene (thickness=10mm); Plywood (thickness=5mm)
2. Wooden header (thickness=20mm)
3. Wooden beam 0.08x0.16m
4. Plate
5. M16 rod with stainless nuts

Bracing of walls and vaults with a timber frame.





# TIMBER FRAME: JOINT DETAIL



Construction site: using craftsmanship techniques with skilled carpenters, 2011.





>  
Wooden structure designed  
to contain the collapse  
of the vault: views from  
outside and inside, 2012.

Structural stabilization of  
pre-existent walls: connecting  
elements of wooden parts  
(reversible), 2011









Pre-existing structures stabilised, enabling the disassembling and re-use of wood in later intervention works, 2012.











The reference to this intervention at the Colosseum is significant in the process we followed in the intervention in the Capuchin Convent in Alferrara<sup>19</sup>. We sought to respect the existing cultural matrix in a citation of the ancient grilles that would have enclosed the openings. Through the integration of perforated blocks, which ensure transversal ventilation and the recreation of conventual ambiances, the primitive construction processes are also suggested, allowing an interpretation that, instead of the convent being in a process of ruin, it is perceived as being in a process of construction.

This approach to the recent history of this Convent, through the disciplinary perspective of Cultural Memory<sup>20</sup>, aims to overcome the barrier of its strict physical recovery. It also aims to reduce the forgetfulness that historiography seems to be disseminating in their studies. We strongly believe that the memory incorporated in heritage interventions acts as a potential process of revisiting places, as spatialities containing experiences which, in some way, may be perceived in these revisitation processes. In the case of the Capuchin Convent of Alferrara, this approach presented a high degree of difficulty, not only because of the already distant functionality and respective process of degradation and de-contextualisation of the surrounding environment, but above all because there is no one to anyone remember the experiences, or who may have transmitted them in the first person, in a building that has not yet overcome the religious abandonment for any other function.

**19** The strategies implemented result from a systematic practice of reflective thinking and a continuous architectural research and practice to find the most suitable solutions for the preservation of natural and cultural heritage. The intervention was guided by the aim to establish a way to achieve a sustainable management of this cultural heritage, so that afterwards, both partners and local stakeholders (from e.g. culture, education, innovation, community), could develop and test new approaches to define the next strategic steps to be taken in this place, to propose and jointly work on new creative and cultural initiatives.

**20** According to Dinah Eastop (2006), who argues that when a building is intervened, in its conservation, material culture is questioned, negotiated and reproduced, it is social life that gives meaning to the life of buildings.

# HOUSES OF GOD IN THE LAND OF MEN

To intervene in heritage, and particularly in religious heritage<sup>21</sup>, means to attend the memories of the historical time, where registered and/or perceptible memories are rescued through several types of sources. The careful visitation of the places to be intervened required disciplinary knowledge in the areas of technologies and social sciences, where the cultural values that cement collective life are articulated. When associated with memory, interventions in architectural heritage safeguard the place intrinsic values, i.e., they contemplate the meaning of the functions and respective spatialities for which they were designed and built. They reposition Men in the meaning of architecture, preventing the feeling of emptiness in favour of the materialities in presence, providing shelter and spiritual comfort.

The sense of memory is mutually dependent of the value of the heritage asset to be intervened, making it inevitable to consider the experiences of the buildings as a process of paying tribute to their users, particularly in spiritual places. Previous individuals, previous souls, performed concrete actions in these spaces, giving them a sense of life and not only of use; in other words, they humanised the architecture with their daily actions, their rites, their stimuli, and cultural expressions inherent to their historical time, while remaining anonymous in the context of society (Mestre, 2014).

Our new conservation approach argues for a comprehensive methodology (Mestre & Aleixo, 2017b) that goes far beyond funding the conservation, or reconstruction of neglected, vandalised or destruct built heritage. It argues for time...it claims that it is desirable that existing decay is stopped, and a continuous use of places is enabled. It considers the threat of decay as an opportunity to begin the planning, not to quickly be reconstructed, but to provide safe

**21** The professional activity developed by vmsa architects in actions of conservation and restoration in religious complexes has allowed to establish comparisons when investigating and articulating the concepts in the scope of interventions in heritage in a holistic framework. The meaning of the territorial and social context in which the buildings are located acquires greater relevance in the case of convents, as it is the case in St Bernard Convent, Câmara de Lobos and Santa Clara Convent, Funchal (Madeira Island) and in the mainland the St. Mary Monastery, Semide - Miranda do Corvo, the Cardaes Convent and the ruined Carmo Convent, Lisbon, and in Porto the Santa Clara Convent.





Ensuring a secure visiting path using the principle of minimum intervention and maximum retention of materials, 2012.

>

Preserving integrity and existence: visiting path with the use of a selected sand in the pavement bounded by the wooden beams, and illuminated by natural light, 2012.









To stop decay and enable a continuous and safe use of places is to consider decay an opportunity and not a threat: suspending time.... 2012.

places in the future. In the Capuchin Convent, the artistic and sensorial detachments reveal the superimposed cycles of lives that occurred in this place. Consequently, the intervention ethics established for this intervention is beyond materiality, inscribing it in a poetic and philosophical context, hoping that the architectural sculptures of a lost time will remain in place.

Scheduled to last for 25 years, the Strategic Plan set out to the Capuchin Convent (Mestre, 2017) allows a slow and shared arrival of the future, proposing to ensure the integrity of the temporal memory present in the existing material values and in the echo that resonates from the walls, in its multiple textures. Considering that an emergency response was firstly needed as a mean to lay foundations for future sustained interventions<sup>22</sup>, the priority was to stabilize the structure, grant secure access to the Convent spaces and mitigate vandalism. At an immediate action of emergency, there was no need to call upon the most recent technology of architecture towards conservation, but merely to establish simple construction tools, clear intervention methods, and choose reusable materials<sup>23</sup>. The time gained with this intervention, which stop the profound degradation of this site, enables knowledge to be produced and lessons to be learned.

**22** The main objective of our proposal was to not rebuild the Convent. We aimed to re-establish a new life cycle, introducing the idea of the foundational construction site in its interior, as if the Convent is frozen in its construction period and not in a process of ruin. The objective of this intervention is therefore to continue to benefit from it without, however, needing to (re)build.

**23** The (almost) permanent presence on site enabled the understanding of the material evidence that was revealed during construction works, providing new knowledge on the materials and structures of the Convent, and therefore allowing for informed design decisions to be established on site with the carpenters and other workers.





The start of the visiting path in the main facade facing South, enabling a filtered light to pass through the concrete block holes on the upper window resembling "stained glass" illuminates the way, 2011.

With its emergency intervention (Phase 1) completed in 2012, the Convent was rescued and an 'urgency to decide' was then avoided. With this stage of the work completed, under the oversight of a qualified architectural and engineering team, and remarkable execution by woodwork professionals, the Convent attractiveness and openness were enhanced by the wooden structure<sup>24</sup> and filtered light, along a trail of orange gravel on the floor, enabling large public attendance with effective protection. In fact, the improvement of security of this place provides the required time to be studied, explored, and comprehended in order to establish a future architectural conservation intervention. Providing a safe use by communities, it continues with the ongoing cultural activities that have taken place, from visiting guided tours, to music events, to workshops, etc., bringing people to see, use and enjoy this place.

It is believed that this innovative path for rescuing built heritage, committed to its safeguard and via a 21<sup>st</sup> century reinterpretation of its reuse, will contribute for general public esteem and for providing the time needed to acquire new knowledge on how to best use this place. What is now urgent is that guidelines for the subsequent phases be established by practitioners, academics and other experts with a cultural approach to heritage. And these guidelines should be established within a considerable, yet realistic timetable, in order to take a further step: to engage society as a whole, considering communities, visitors and civil society and other stakeholders.



Cultural event at the Capuchin Convent:  
accordion performance by Celina da Piedade,  
August 2012.

**24** The wooden structure was developed according to the principle of enabling the perception and use of the Convent spaces. The trusses introduce complexity, rhythm and simultaneously 'deconstruct' the building while stabilizing the vaults in danger of collapse, located in the nave, sacristy and refectory.



Learning from historic timber structures: the revival of traditional carpentry techniques, 2012.



## REFERENCES

- Aleixo, S., & Mestre, V. (2022). **Memória e recordação: valores intangíveis na intervenção contemporânea em património construído nos casos dos conventos de Alferrara.** *Lusitania Sacra*, (44), 137-158. <https://doi.org/10.34632/lusitaniasacra.2021.11577>
- Aleixo, S., & Mestre, V. (2020). **Reunir o tempo e o espaço no/do Convento dos Capuchos de Alferrara.** In Conde, A. F., Magalhães, O., & Gouveia, A. C. (Eds.), *O Claustro e o Século: Espaços, Fronteiras e Identidades*. Publicações do Cidehus. <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.cidehus.9291>
- Aleixo, S., & Mestre, V. (2022, November 14). **SOAR selection of best practices: Monastery of the Capuchins in Alferrara Valorisation and Visiting Path 2010|2012.** Brussels. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7373851>
- Andersen, H. C. (1984 [1878]) *Uma visita a Portugal em 1866*. (2nd ed.). Instituto de Cultura e Língua Portuguesa, Ministério da Educação.
- Byron, R. (2014 [1937]) *A estrada para Oxiana*. Edições Tinta-da-China.
- Connerton, P. (2006) **Cultural memory.** In Tilley, C.Y. (Ed.) *Handbook of Material Culture* (pp. 315-324). SAGE.
- Council of Europe, (2005) *Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*.
- Eastop, D. (2006) **Conservation as Material Culture.** In Tilley, C.Y. et al. (Eds.) *Handbook of Material Culture*, (pp. 516-533). SAGE.
- Giaccardi, E. & Plate, L. (2016) **How Memory Comes to Matter.** In Munteán, L.; Plate, L. & Smelik, A. (Eds.) *Materializing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* (pp. 65-88). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315472171>
- Giaccardi, E. (2012) **Introduction: reframing heritage in a participatory culture.** In Giaccardi, E. (Ed.) *Heritage and Media: Understanding heritage in a participatory culture* (pp. 1-10). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203112984>
- Goethe, J. W. (2001 [1816]) *Viagem a Itália*. Relógio D'Água.
- Grassi, G. (2003) *Arquitectura lengua muerta y otros escritos*. Serbal
- Jokilehto, J. (1999) *A History of Architectural Conservation*. Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Kant, I. (2020 [1763]) *Observações sobre o sentimento do belo e do sublime*. Edições 70.
- Lowenthal, D. (2005) **Stewarding the Future.** *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship*, 2 (2), 20-39.
- Mestre, V. (2014) **A 'reconfiguração' do tempo e do lugar como ética de intervenção nos Conventos de São Paulo e dos Capuchos na Serra da Arrábida.** *Revista Movimento Cultural*, (0), 93-96.
- Mestre, V. (2017) **Caderno 0.6 – Síntese da metodologia de intervenção inscrita no Plano Director de conservação, restauro e reversão da unidade patrimonial da Quinta de São Paulo – 2017.** *Cadernos de Alferrara*, (0), 120-123. <http://hdl.handle.net/10174/22570>
- Mestre, V. & Aleixo, S. (2015) **Convento dos Capuchos. Serra da Arrábida, Setúbal. Selecção Habitar Portugal 2012-14.** Lisboa: Ordem dos Arquitectos, Mapei.
- Mestre, V. & Aleixo, S. (2017a) **El movimiento de las sombras en el Convento do Carmo (Lisboa) y en el Convento dos Capuchos (Setúbal).** *Loggia, Arquitectura & Restauración*, (30), 32-51. <https://doi.org/10.4995/loggia.2017.5150>
- Mestre, V. & Aleixo, S. (2017b) **Caderno 0.5 – Conventos de São Paulo e Capuchos: Relatório Diagnóstico – 2011.** *Cadernos de Alferrara*, (0), 79-119. <http://hdl.handle.net/10174/22603>
- Osanna, M. (2021) *Pompeia: o tempo reencontrado – as novas descobertas*. Quetzal Editores.
- Pascoal, S. (2019) **Mapping Hans Christian Andersen's A Visit to Portugal: Lived and Fictional Spaces.** *Aktualitet - Litteratur, Kultur Og Medier*, 13 (1), 30-45. <https://tidsskrift.dk/aktualitet/article/view/112050>
- Ramos do Ó, J. (2011) **Plural memory and fidelity to inheritance. Considerations on the intervention of Victor Mestre and Sofia Aleixo in the hundred-year-old building of the Passos Manuel.** Neves, J. M. (Ed.) *Heritage: Between Time and Movement: Liceu Passos Manuel*. pp. 198-211. Uzina Books

Riegl, A. (1984 [1903]) *O culto moderno dos monumentos e outros ensaios estéticos*. Edições 70.

Serrão, V. e Meco, J. (2007) *Palmela Histórico-Artística, um inventário do património artístico concelhio*. Edições Colibri e Câmara Municipal de Palmela, pp. 207-304.

Silberman, N. & Purser, M. (2012). **Collective Memory as Affirmation: People-Centered Cultural Heritage in a Digital Age**. In Giaccardi, E. (Ed.) *Heritage and Social Media: Understanding heritage in a participatory culture* (pp. 13-29). Routledge.

Smith, L. (2006) *Uses of Heritage*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Tanizaki, J. (1999 [1933]) *O elogio da sombra*. Relógio D'Água.

UNESCO (2003) *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*.





Traditional materials and traditional crafts as cultural heritage: North Transept and the wooden structure design of the dome, 2012

## Technical Data

**Project** | Rescuing and Safeguard of Capuchin Convent in Alferrara

**Intervention Type** | Cultural and structural stabilization, and visiting path

**Location** | 2°56.3'N 8°54'32.9"W | Setúbal, Portugal

**Design** 2010 | 2011

**Intervention** 2011 | 2012

**Intervention Gross Area** | 755,00 m<sup>2</sup>

**Investment** | € 125.000,00

**Client** | Association of Municipalities of the Setúbal Region (AMRS): President Rui Garcia, General Secretary Fátima Mourinho and Fábio Vicente

**Site supervision** | AMRS

**General Contractor** | Nova Construção: Nuno Proença ; woodwork: Manuel Barreto

**Maintenance** | AMRS

**Project leader** | Victor Mestre

**Architecture** | Victor Mestre | Sofia Aleixo, vmsa architects

**Architecture Team** | Nuno Gaspar, Daniel Pires, Carlos Graça architects

**Estimate of building costs** | Coopas, Hugo Pombo

**Conservation** | António Vasques, restoration expert

**Structural Stabilization** | A2P Consult: João Appleton and Pedro Ribeiro, engineers

**Research** | Victor Mestre and Sofia Aleixo

**Photography** | José Manuel & vmsa archive

**Distinctions** | Selection Habitar Portugal 12-14, Portuguese Chamber of Architects /Mapei, 2015

Best Security by Design Practice Examples in Religious Architecture, EU-funded project SOAR (Strengthening the security and resilience Of At-risk Religious sites and communities), 2022

### Webography

<https://www.mestrealeixo.pt/convento-capuchos-info>

<https://alferrara.amrs.pt/contactos.html>

<http://habitarportugal.org/PT/projecto/convento-dos-capuchos/>

[https://vimeo.com/198226059?embedded=true&source=vimeo\\_logo&owner=14159714](https://vimeo.com/198226059?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=14159714)

<https://www.ace-cae.eu/activities/eu-funded-projects/on-going-projects/soar-call-for-architecture-best-practice-examples/>

[https://soarproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/dlm\\_uploads/2022/11/6\\_Sofia-Aleixo\\_VMSA-1.pdf](https://soarproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2022/11/6_Sofia-Aleixo_VMSA-1.pdf)





### **Victor Mestre.**

Architect by ESBAL, 1981. Master in Architectural and Landscape Heritage Conservation by Évora University, 1998. Advanced Diploma in Theory and Practice of Architectural and Urban Rehabilitation by Sevilla University, 2005. PhD in Cultural Heritage of Portuguese Influence by Coimbra University, 2018. Visiting Professor in Higher Education since 2000. Director of the Heritage Safeguard Cabinet, Directorate-General for National Buildings and Monuments (DGEMN), 2000|2003. Independent Researcher of Architectural Heritage and Traditional Architecture in Açores and Madeira, and in the territories of Portuguese cultural influence, namely Brasil, Cabo Verde, Goa, Damão and Diu, Macau, Timor, Guiné among others. Author of the book on Vernacular Architecture of Goa, focusing on the dwelling, its context, and types (INCM, 2022).



### **Sofia Aleixo.**

Architect by FA-UTL, 1991. Pedagogical Aptitude and Scientific Capacity Proofs at Évora University, 2007. PhD in Architectural Conservation by Oxford Brookes University, UK, 2016. Teaches in Higher Education since 1996: IADE, 1996 | 2000 and Évora University, Architecture Department, since 2001, where she is currently an Associate Professor. Director and Coordinator-Architect of the Technical Local Cabinet in Belver, Gavião, 1999|2001. Integrated researcher at SLHI/CHAM – FCSH/UNL, and collaborator at CHAIA and IHC-CEHFCi – University of Évora. Coordinator of the architecture section of the research and publishing programme RIC portal on Magazines of Ideas and Culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and author of the book on cultural values change in the rehabilitation of historic schools in Portugal (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021).

**vmsa architects, architectural research and practice founded by Victor Mestre and Sofia Aleixo, published works** – *Património. Quinta Alegre* (2018); *Heritage continuity, an ethical link* (2014); *Victor Mestre: ao [per]correr [d]a vida* (2013); *Vale Formoso Elderly Home + Historic Quarter of Santa Cruz* (2012); *Heritage: between time and movement: Lyceu Passos Manuel* (2011); and *Time Rehabilitation* (2004).



**UoU Reflections Series** is the output of the acclaimed online UoU Port Talks, organized during the COVID-19 lockdown. With a glass of Port in hand, teachers and students met in a virtual room to share, in a 15-minute lecture, a vision from professional practice, practical examples on teaching and learning, and any other topic related to Architecture Education.

This collection of monographs, published both on paper and in an electronic version under an open access policy (<https://uou.ua.es/>), reveals the academic reflections of a community of Higher Education students & teachers excited to be part of a wider project: the UNIVERSITY of Universities.

#### **Series Coordinator**

Javier Sánchez Merina, Alicante University



Universitat d'Alacant  
Universidad de Alicante