

# Manuel Mendes Interviews Fernando Távora.

## Edifícios (1988)

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*Fernando Távora, Edifícios, Cedro School, Tradition in History, Notion of Modernity*

### /Abstract

The following text is an unpublished interview with Fernando Távora carried out in 1988 for *Edifícios*, the project of a magazine of systems, urbanism, and architecture, outlined by Eduardo Oliveira Fernandes, Alexandre Aves Costa, Manuel Mendes, and accompanied by Luís Marques, then a member of the staff of the Entity that held the title. The project was suspended by the decision of that Entity at the time of the development of Issue 1. At that time, the interview with Fernando Távora by Javier Frechilla, published in *Arquitectura* (COAM's magazine, no. 261, July-August 1986), was very much present. At the time of the interview for *Edifícios*, Fernando Távora's health problems, together with the inexperience of the interviewer, hindered the fluency of the discourse and the clarity of the exposition of the topics under discussion, thus diverting and suspending the ordinary course of the interview. In the transcription of the recordings, some of these moments are noted; the sign [...] records inaudible word(s) in the fixed text. (MM)

### /Author

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Architect

Architect graduated (ESBAP, 1980), PhD (FAUP, 2011) and lecturer at ESBAP and FAUP in Architecture History and Theory subjects. He is a retired assistant professor at FAUP, where he was the head of the 2nd and 3rd-year Theory course named "Architecture Circumstance Manifesto" and "Writing Research Project", an option course for 4th and 5th-year Master students (MIARQ course). He is part of the research group "Architecture: Theory, Project, History" at CEAU-FAUP and of the Documentation and Research Center in Architectural Culture (CICA) of the Marques da Silva Foundation (FIMS). He has developed several researches in the field of 20th-century architecture – namely related to its Portuguese and Porto components –, regularly publishing written works in journals and books, such as: "Contemporary Portuguese Architecture, 1965-1985" (co-authored with Nuno Portas). Milan: Electa editrice, 1991; "baixa portuense" – pure representation (city culture and architecture, memory and design – 14 signs for the 'city to come') in *Porto 2001: Return to Downtown*. Porto: FAUP publications, 2000; "(In)forming modernity. Porto architectures, 1923-1943: morphologies, movements, metamorphoses". Porto: FAUP publications, 2001; "Ah, the human yearning to be river or quay!", in *Fernando Távora*. Milan: Electa, 2005. In the second semester of 2003, he conducted a survey of the written work of Nuno Portas, being editor and coordinator of the publication *Nuno Portas. Writings*, in three volumes, finalist work at the FAD Prize, Barcelona, 2005. He designed, programmed, and (co-) organized events related to the heritage and knowledge of architecture. Between 1992 and 2006, he reorganized and directed the Editorial Service of FAUP, editing and/or producing about fifty titles. Between 2001 and 2008, he was part of the Editorial Board of the Oporto University Publisher. In 1988, 1990, 1992, 1994 and 1996, he participated as a member of the Support Committee to the Jury in selecting architectural works for the European Prize for Architecture Mies van der Rohe Pavilion, Barcelona.

**The family upbringing, the school education, and the notion of post-war architectural transformations are all themes that certainly allow us to approach your training process and your problems at the beginning of your career...**

Just yesterday, I was asking myself, in those thoughts one has when driving a car, why did I choose to be an architect? Because there were very favorable conditions for me to have chosen a profession, a training, of an artistic nature. I have already discovered that the so-called ability to draw comes from my grandfather, who used to draw, sculpt, etc. My father always used to say he was a disaster, and I had proof of that several times. But he had a brother, called Fernando, who drew very well, and he inherited those qualities from my grandfather. My older brother, Bernardo, drew very, very well. So, there was a certain facility for drawing. On the other hand, my father was a man with a law degree, conservative in spirit, politically an integralist, and monarchist, which led him to be very interested in historical issues, cultural activities, visits that we made as a family, etc.

There was also an important factor: because of circumstances of family origin, there were several houses to which the family was connected. My uncle Fernando, my father's older brother, lived in a house by Nasoni: the house in Ramalde that I had known since I was a boy and a house that I often visited. The house in Sepins, where my father was from, although he wasn't born there, it was a house that belonged to my father's side; it was said to have the imprint of Machado de Castro, which was an endless source of sculptures and architecture from that region of Coimbra; it wasn't by him, but it had something to do with Machado de Castro. Still on my father's side, the house in Amoreira was a beautiful 18th century baroque house. On my mother's side, there was a 17th century house that I shared, a late 18th century house, neoclassical, and there was another set of houses. Then, there was a city that my mother and I were very connected to, which was the city of Guimarães.

And there was my brother Bernardo, the eldest, who was a civil engineer, who drew very well and did architectural projects, which I remember. I remember my father gave him a book by Raul Lino, and my brother did an architectural test for a chair in civil engineering, with a beautiful house that was very inspired, strongly inspired by a project by Raul Lino, in a lacustrine area in Minho. I remember that the dedication of the book to my brother, made by my father, said, "for my son Bernardo so that in his professional activity he always follows the lessons of the great masters".

And there was also this tradition on my mother's side, on the side of the Viscount of Pindela, the Count of Arnoso, the houses, etc... Well, there was really a series of favorable conditions for this type of training.

It was under these conditions that I went to the School, but with many reservations from my family environment. My brother advised my father that I should take a course in civil engineering, with the idea that, being an engineer, I would do the engineering project and the architectural project as well; being an architect, I would only do architecture because it was a secondary course; if



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I was an engineer, I would do what engineers did and what architects couldn't do because it was a higher course. This situation led me to make an effort: I stayed in seventh grade, which wasn't necessary at the time, and I also took the admission exams for the military studies, the Faculty of Engineering and the School of Fine Arts. I passed the three admissions; I went to my father and told him I wanted to be an architect. And I did the architecture course. And I really was an architect.

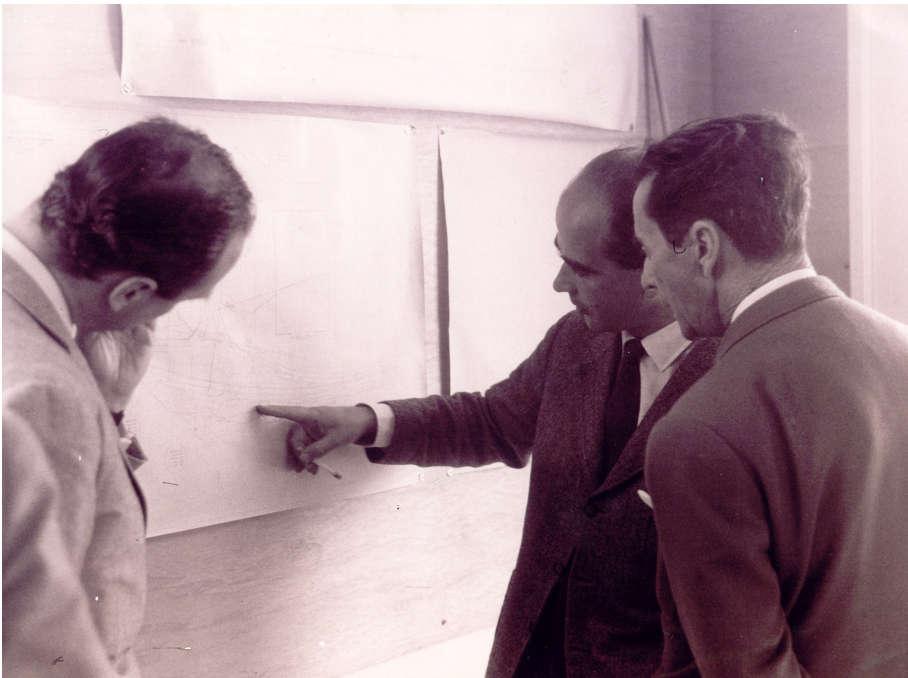
The training I had at the School was very consistent with my family background: quite conservative, although with some touches, from time to time, of the modern man that was Carlos Ramos, his lessons, but never very intense modernity, never very affected. The works of the 1st and 2nd year were works on classical themes, I still keep some of those works<sup>1</sup> and, therefore, let's say that the School did not force me. What forced me to have a modern education, which I tried to do, was, above all, the contact with colleagues who, at the time, were called Fernando Lanhas, Júlio Resende (older), Nadir Afonso, Júlio Pomar, etc. There was a group that I got on with there, some older and some younger, who created a climate of a certain progressivism. There was a certain political progressiveness, but not political in my case. I was never very close to those groups; I was well known and established; I wasn't as well-known as them because the police didn't allow dissembling, but it was known that I always had relations with those people. I also had relations with Delfim Amorim, who later went to Brazil, with Viana de Lima, with older people, some of whom were already outside the School [...] But perhaps the person with whom I had the closest relationship was with Lanhas, because we worked together, we even had an office after we finished the course. Lanhas was very curious and, despite everything, a little more advanced than me.

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1 In the unedited version: I still have some of these exercises on the classic.

Fig. 1

Casa do Costeado, Guimarães, one of the Távora family's houses (FIMS/AFT).



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All this created some difficulties for me, not so much in my course, where I tried to do some things in a modern style, but I was weak. The training was quite loose, and things arrived very fresh; there wasn't much time to learn them except formally; the theoretical training was weak not very well founded<sup>2</sup>. Everything was a bit empty, a bit absent, a bit formal. What I really tried to do was to ground my interests and understand why, why to make modern architecture, why relate architecture to urbanism, why relate architecture to society, in short, all those kinds of modern themes that weren't really dealt with much. Hence, for example, the complete reading of Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, something that nobody reads today but I did, the whole book annotated.

When I was in military service, in one of the periods in Vendas Novas, reading the whole Spengler was one of my entertainments. Why was that? Because Spengler, regardless of his concepts, does a wonderful thing, which consists of relating events, and I have always been concerned with knowing why things are in a certain way and what relations exist so that this table has this shape. Relationships that are not only formal but of all kinds, deep relationships of historical notion and sensibility. That is what I sought, and it upset my life a little because I became more demanding. As a student at the School, the things I did with the other students were actually a bit based on a book that arrived from Brazil. From Le Corbusier, when the first things started to appear.

Then in my professional life things got more complicated because I was more demanding. That's why, on the one hand, I had a major professional crisis. I stopped working, and for two years, I was incapable of doing any work, and I

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2 In the recording: today, despite everything, we have a more solid structure, even if we complain about it.

Fig. 2

Fernando Távora and Carlos Ramos (FIMS/AFT).

even created some rather ridiculous situations, such as refusing work on the grounds that I had too much to do. I didn't have anything to do but I was almost completely incapable [...]

I was very interested in urbanism, although at school it was not a very interesting subject. My interest in urbanism came from this obsession with the totality of things.

My entrance to the Câmara (Municipality): I put in a word with the Câmara, introduced myself to the President and entered the Gabinete de Urbanização da Câmara (Town Planning Office), in fact this room we are in, on this floor. In town planning, design problems arose naturally. I never thought of town planning as a field in which drawing was not important, but one in which, despite everything, at least this is how I saw it, I would say it was a responsible drawing but one that was less recognizable, like architectural drawing was. And I started to take a great interest in urban planning problems. Here in the Gabinete de Urbanização, I had splendid contacts with the Director of the Office, the engineer José Miguel Resende, who was a man with whom I loved to discuss; we had discussions that started here in the morning and ended at 6, 7 p.m. in the Café Imperial, along the Praça da Batalha, Santo António, because I was a kid, I was a fierce character, I used to tease people a little out of curiosity.

And that's how I, with this familiar atmosphere, with this School and, afterwards, with the first times here in the Urbanization Office, became [...] or made my pedestal on which my professional practice is based.

**Regarding your words, I remember the text that accompanied the presentation of the Cedro School. At a certain point, you say that, initially, architecture was, for you, something like a white virgin, something inaccessible, and then you discovered that architecture was something much more natural than anyone could do.**

Yes. Because... initially it was ignorance, then it was sophistication, and then I filled the spirit with complications.

Just the other day, talking about a building that is under construction, I said *there is too much architecture*. Today I'm beginning to say that architecture has too much architecture. It seems paradoxical, but it's what I think, at least when I feel that architecture appears too much; there is a concept of architecture that goes beyond the concept of architecture in the proper sense, understood as decoration, as something added. So, in that first phase, I thought that architecture [was a mythical thing]. I didn't really know what it was, and then I saw it as something extremely complicated. Today, I see it more and more as a natural act. That's why sometimes I say that there's too much architecture, if I may be allowed the paradox because architecture should never be too much, but today it's a little bit decorative, a little bit effeminate... It is a theme that I have developed in my work for the school, that of architecture as



of any art. Architecture is so important, so important, so important that it's as important as the air. It's something that involves us completely, it's a kind of second nature. And so, as second nature, it is something in which everyone participates. That's why it must be, and really is, a natural event. That's why a kind of architectural culture must be very widespread, something that today is, I suppose, lost.

It's my idea that when a lady (I say a lady, not out of disrespect or because it's a stupid act) changes a white color to a pink or yellow in a room, she makes a strong act of architecture because she strongly alters the space of that room. And that, apparently, is a simple thing: go to a catalogue, change from white or yellow to red, red to blue... it doesn't matter, but it's an important act of architecture. These acts, normally, are not considered acts of architecture. So, there are acts that are acts of architecture and acts that are not acts of architecture. I believe there must be a process whereby every act of relative and variable importance is an act of architecture and, therefore, transforms the important acts into ordinary acts and gives more importance to those considered less important.

I suppose that specialism is one of the tragedies that exist today; people recognise it, and we are all victims of it. There is a specialism in architecture, "this man is an architect"; you need an architect for this, you don't need an architect for that. It is accepted, for example, that you can design roads. In Portugal, you make a diagram of the road, currently by IP (Infrastructures de Portugal), and I would like to know how many architects are connected to this very important work of creating a road in a completely new landscape, choice of landscape, integration in the terrain..., very few of course. Even how many architects are involved in urbanism itself and in many other works that are carried out every day. Very few people. Of course, you may say to me: "There are no architects for everything". No, there really aren't. But I also think that many of these architects are not interested in these jobs, partly because today the notion of architecture, in my opinion, is a little divinised. People think that certain jobs are not for architects; they're for other people.

The truth is that the awareness of architecture as a second nature should be more widespread in architectural culture. Everything is fine, apparently, but cutting down a tree or destroying a house changes a whole system, so there has to be a great sensitivity to the space in which we all participate.

**In a way, one could say that in your training, particularly during that period of transition from school to professional practice, even if it is a problem that accompanies you throughout your experience, there is a kind of problematic encounter between the traditional aspects of architecture and the sense of modernity, of keeping up with progress, the evolution of the working techniques that the architect has at his disposal. At that time when you apparently felt more need to make modern architecture outside, especially in Europe,**

**there was something of the opposite. Architects, in a way, were debating how to associate the new with the values of tradition, the recovery of tradition in history. In what way is this not yet another contradiction in the world of conflicts that accompanied you in those years?**

It is like this. Despite everything, in my case, I have the impression that the contrast between what I thought needed to evolve and the evolution that architecture was undergoing was never very serious. Despite everything, I integrated myself a little into that movement that was overtaking modern architecture/international architecture, and because of the contacts I had and even because I always had that little tail of a certain culture, a certain relationship with traditional things.

Interestingly, what I see is that nowadays I am more, how shall I say? More modern in the sense of going back to the sources. I explain. I find that, first of all, I had a very strong Corbusian education. Le Corbusier was the great man at that time. Secondly, no longer as a student, but as an assistant at the School there was a European Wrightian invasion, provoked by Zevi's dissemination who discovered in Wright perhaps a process of gaining a certain prestige as a critic. That was Zevi's big bombshell because he abandoned his Wright publicity and, in a sense, [moved away]<sup>3</sup> a bit from European criticism. But in the meantime, there was a certain crisis in international architecture. The death of Le Corbusier, the incredible things that were said when the man died, some of them quite claudicating [?] and daring in relation to a man of that calibre. But the truth is that with the centenary, Le Corbusier comes back again. And I have a kind of, I wouldn't say, second childhood, second return to the figure of Le Corbusier, a return from the point of view of professional practice and the use of forms, naturally different from the one I had in the first phase, which was more direct. So, now more interpreted, perhaps more elaborate, but I return to [...].

In fact, I suppose it's not a personal case; I suppose it's a current trend, a certain revision of Le Corbusier, a certain recognition of Le Corbusier, and of new potentialities for the present moment. On the other hand, when a guy reaches the age of 65, as is my case, it is natural to have some nostalgia for childhood and that return, also in the formation of traditional values, naturally much more elaborate<sup>4</sup>. What I feel nowadays is that I'm doing perhaps the most interesting things a person can do, which I think it's wonderful to be able to say this, it probably doesn't happen... I mean, I don't feel old at all, I feel, on the contrary, completely fresh. Nor do I feel that this return to the first childhood, this second childhood, is a manifestation of dumbing down, senility. This at a time when it seems to me that part of architecture is suffering. Great architecture is always doing well because there are always some men of genius and talent.

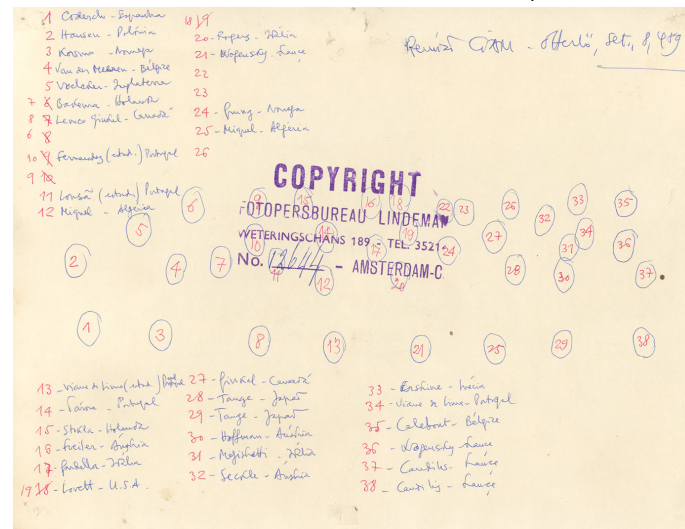
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3 In the recording: he cancelled himself.

4 On the recording: In fact, I suppose it's not a personal thing; I suppose it's a current trend, a certain revision of Le Corbusier, and a certain recognition of Le Corbusier, and of new potential for the present moment, but also this elaboration of essential values of our tradition, that is, when one reaches – as is my case – the age of 65, on the one hand, it's natural for him to have some nostalgia for his childhood and this return (in the case of Le Corbusier) also in the case of this formation of traditional values, but it comes back naturally much more elaborate.



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They always do well, but I think that minor and current architecture is a bit of a mess because I think it's too formal, too formalist...

**Earlier, you spoke about the relationship with colleagues for the understanding of the notion of modernity. Are there other types of relationships, that is, is there closer contact with other arts, is there closer contact with another knowledge, more markedly generational? Contacts with previous generations? Contacts with people from Lisbon, where, despite everything, perhaps the possibility of realization is a little wider? Or is this whole process a bit individual?**

I'm a shy person; maybe I don't look like it, but I'm really a bit of a mess when it comes to relationships. For example, international congresses were never my specialty, even for language difficulties. From the point of view of relationships, I had great friends and many contacts, but I always had some limitations. But I understand that I had many contacts, trips, international congresses, and CIAMs, where if I didn't speak, I had the opportunity to listen, which is so metimes more important: knowing how to listen more than knowing how to speak.

The truth is that, despite everything, I have the impression that my training is very personal, bookish in the bad sense because I have always been concerned with acquiring books, reading the works that I find and consider most significant, etc. So, I think my training is quite well-founded. Apart from one thing that you might think I don't have because I'm a chatty and talkative man... which is a large, intimate, personal life of thought. I'm a person who thinks about things a lot. I have my moments, my evenings of reconsidering my life, my professional activity, my synthesis. I have written a lot, which is something that forces us to rethink, synthesize, etc. Professional practice itself forces us to do that and I have had quite an intense professional practice. I know that I am considered a

Fig. 3, 4

CIAM Congress XI, Otterlo 1959, group photograph featuring Fernando Távora, José Coderch, Arne Korsmo, Jaap Bakema, Ignazio Gardella, Ernesto Nathan Rogers, André Wogensky, Kenzo Tange, Vico Magistretti, Eduard Franz Sekler, Ralph Erskine, Georges Candillis and the Portuguese Sérgio Fernandez, Bento Lousá and Alfredo Viana de Lima and others (FIMS/AFT).



rather lazy professional, but I am not a lazy type in that sense. What I am is, on the one hand, a guy who is a little slow to decide things, which is a temperamental thing, something that goes beyond me, and, besides this, I am a man who likes to do things with a certain care, I am very careful in what I write, in what I do. I won't do things with a great quality, I do them with the quality that I can, but at least I try to do them with a certain rigour, a certain precision, a certain thoughtfulness; that is what I seek.

So, I suppose that this evolution was mostly at the expense of myself, now evidently interpreting others, knowing others.

**Le Corbusier was a personality that marked you. Could you explain in which way Le Corbusier is a chosen one in your way of thinking and creating, or in which way Le Corbusier is a quasi-value of your intimacy? Which personalities have marked you more than Le Corbusier?**

When I discovered, which was perhaps not right at the beginning, that Le Corbusier is an Occidental, he is a Mediterranean, French, obviously. I have even read, in these studies that have been done on Le Corbusier's adolescence, the explanation of his shift from a Swiss concept to a Mediterranean concept, the search for a Mediterranean concept as solving problems of a Swiss identity.

In Le Corbusier, there is something that touches me, obviously, which is the capacity for creation. That sense of Mediterranean, basically the so-called play of forms under the light, that definition he gives of architecture, is something I am really very sensitive to. It's not because it's a Nordic thing. The English, Arts and Crafts, and even a little Frank Lloyd Wright have interesting relationships with Nature. Equally important is a certain sobriety, richness but sobriety, which doesn't exist so much in Wright, whose forms are not sober; they are more human, more comfortable. This hardness, sometimes a little almost religious in Le Corbusier, for example, is something that touches me. And again, geometrical sense, a sense of geometry, the geometry of the right angle, also of a great firmness of the solutions.

There are a series of circumstances, which I suppose are particular to our Mediterranean architecture, to which I connect temperamentally; I connect perhaps as a Portuguese because the truth is that Le Corbusier is a Frenchman and a very strong Mediterranean; it was already known, but today it's documented. But it is that sense [...] it is that identity that Portuguese architecture does not have.

Portuguese architecture always has a flavour that Barata Feyo called *gaucherie*; Portuguese things always have a certain *gaucherie*. We see this in Brazil, in the things made in Brazil and in India, which really have those characteristics of the European thing, of the Mediterranean, but then there is always a personal touch, a little betrayal, or in the geometry, or in the rigour, or in the implantation, which in fact gives things a certain humanity. And that I feel I have in what I do...



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Obviously, I, for reasons of incapacity, would never achieve the power that Le Corbusier's works have, an emotional power. But it also seems to me that there is a certain Portuguese-ness that does not allow those things to be done by a Portuguese person. I have the impression that the Portuguese give things [...]. It is our so-called lyricism, a certain humanity, a certain presence of the person that, despite everything, despite the rigour, despite the geometry, appears in the things we do through the betrayal of labour, or through a certain professional incompetence or through a small difficulty that arose in the project, or through the client who presses a small change. That gives, in my opinion, a certain character to our things...

**So, Le Corbusier is clearly the primary reference. Are there others? Wright?**

Yes, then, over time, others appear. My passion for Frank Lloyd Wright is well known. When I was in the United States, I was highly impressed by what I saw. Just last year, in 1988, I was there with Siza, in part of Wright's houses in Oak Park, the Unitarian Chapel, and a number of works that we saw. We didn't happen to go to New York, we didn't see the Guggenheim. But we saw the Johnson factory, for example, very interesting works that I don't see as belonging to my family; I see them as interesting works by a stranger, just like the things made by the Mexicans, the wonderful Kahn, the Pyramid of the Sun, the Pyramid of the Moon, the Temple of [...], but we are light years away from that kind of thing.

Fig. 5

CIAM congress VIII, Hoddesdon 1951, Fernando Távora and Le Corbusier with Piero Bottoni, André Wogensky, Takamasa Yoshizaka, Le Corbusier, Kenzo Tange, Alfred Roth and others at CIAM (FIMS/AFT).

**And in the field of theory, is there any text that, particularly in these years, has been something important?**

No, I've never... Curiously enough, I've always been more interested in – how shall I put it? – the texts by architects. Texts that are never very theoretical, texts by architects as architects; the reading of the works and the reading of texts about the works, more than the reading of theoretical texts... I can't tell you... Of course, I have read something, but my theoretical training is based more on my own professional practice or on the professional practice of others and their texts, rather than through texts that are already theoretical in themselves.

I might go on to tell you that some of the texts that have moved me most as an architect are texts by Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier (of course), and Perret; texts written by architects themselves, generally based on their professional practice or as elements anticipating a genesis of a professional practice, directives for professional practice itself more than pure theoretical texts.

**Still, about learning, training or the evolution of this training, I believe that an important training factor is travelling. You travel a lot and you have always made travelling a way of knowing, of acquiring knowledge. How is travelling thus an important instrument of knowledge? What role does it play in your relationship with the world?**

What I think is important in travelling, with the difficulties that it brings, is the knowledge of new realities, not only of buildings but of people, behaviours, languages, climates and therefore, basically, the understanding of the building.

I am an architecture addicted. Although I say that there is too much architecture in things, the truth is that I am very much an architect, and I live very much obsessed with architecture. Curiously, I am a man who is not very interested in Nature. Even now, on this trip to Brazil, when I was able to visit the Amazon River, the Rio Negro, the forest, and such, it wasn't exactly the thing I was most sensitive to. I was much more sensitive, despite everything, to the cities and buildings. I'm not a great amateur in Nature, but this means that I'm a fan and addicted to architecture.

So, what interests me when travelling is identifying situations and re-understanding the relationships between things: why houses are like this, why people are like this as a consequence of houses, why cities are like this and what are the relationships between cities and houses. A whole system that defines the shape of a country, the shape of a city or a house; or why people dress like this or like that according to the climate. As far as it is possible to find, on the one hand, a system of relations, and on the other hand, the difference of situations.

I think this is interesting in our professional practice. No two situations are identical, even in our professional practice and in a small environment like the



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day life of any architect working in Oporto, which is my case, of one who, of course, doesn't go to work in New York, because he is not asked to; he works here in a small environment. Even so, the circumstances of each work are very different, and I think it's very interesting that definition of the circumstances, of the conditions of each work. It's fundamental, it gives the work its character, it gives the work its identity. That's why I used to say that I'm a bit slow because I like to delve into the conditions that determine the work, the conditions that allow a work, as I say, after a while, to change the colour of its eyes to the extent that it is the work itself that will command the architect. This means knowing the conditions, observing them, studying them, defining them and, in a certain sense, following them.

So that's kind of what I'm interested in on the trip.

**Of those trips, is there an itinerary that has particularly marked you? Is there a particular passion for a particular city, for example?**

No. Of course, I started by travelling a bit by chance, by circumstance: Spain, France, Italy, the United States, with a big grant from the Gulbenkian Foundation, Japan. But then I began to try to put my journeys in order, to understand my world with some exactness. Hence the trip I made with a group of colleagues to

Fig. 6

Fernando Távora in Rome, 1947 (FIMS/AFT).



Greece to understand the system that Fernando Pessoa called Greece-Rome-Christianity, since Christendom was closer to me in Europe. Of this system, Rome I already knew. Then, in Greece, I felt the need to go to Egypt to understand – this is something that is not clearly studied – the Egypt-Greece relationship. The contribution of Egypt to the formation of Greece and, therefore, to this axis of ours that generated all of us, to today's Europe, practically to today's world. [On the one hand,] the sense of the generation of the man that we are, on the other hand, the concern as a Portuguese and hence my going to India, for example, to look for something that has always moved me very much, which is our relations with the East, and now my going to Brazil.

So, what does it mean? It means, on the one hand, that I manage, I'm probably already in a financial position to structure the idea of the trip a little, to understand what the trip is for; on the other hand, the feeling that there's not enough time, that I have to choose my itineraries because I no longer have time to... But, in this scheme of things, I still have some itineraries to do, exactly to understand my world and understand myself, understand Portugal and understand all of this. And travelling, in that sense, is very useful because it's a total change of climate or, when it's not different, feeling why there's no change, as is the case in Brazil. It's exciting to change country, to travel I don't know how many hours by plane, travel thousands of kilometres, and meet people from Vila da Feira, Ponte de Lima or Viana do Castelo, speaking Portuguese that is very similar to ours.

**Perhaps we could move on to a second theme, which has little to do with Portuguese architecture. Your commitment to understanding Portuguese architecture and its specificity is well known, architecture created in conditions that are quite distant from the major cultural centres. Can we speak of a specificity of Portuguese architecture? Are there any premises from which one can build a basis for the identity of that architecture?**

Well, I am obsessed with saying yes, and more than Portuguese, because I mean one from the North and another from the South, for example. I say that these characters do not divide the country into coastal and inland areas, considering the vertical axis, because, well known and felt by all of us, is the fact that Portugal, being a relatively small country, is sensitively varied along its North-South axis, but [...]; on the other hand, because my knowledge of the South, Lisbon, etc., for me is always the entrance into a different world. Of course, it is relatively easy to say this and difficult to say what the elements of that North/South identity are, or, if we want a slightly broader level, of a national identity in relation to Europe, in relation to the world. But I think it exists because I see it with my own eyes. I arrive in India, and I see things that I only see in Portugal and that I confuse with things from Spain, our near neighbours. When I arrive in Brazil, I see Portuguese things that I do not confuse with things from Spanish America or from our neighbouring Spain, I do not confuse with Italian things, I do not confuse with French things, I do not confuse with English or German things.

I think that there really is a national identity. What I think is that the vision we have of it, or that I have, or most people have (by the way, I am not aware of any appropriate studies on this subject) is a bit sentimental, a bit of impression, of *feeling, of feeling*, and not properly documented. But, if there really is... or, going beyond architecture, if there really is a Portuguese man, I suppose there is in relation to the Spanish man, the Brazilian man, the American man. How can that Portuguese man not produce Portuguese architecture? I don't know about that... But if you ask, "What are the characteristics of Portuguese architecture?" That's more complicated. You know that Alexandre made an attempt that, in my opinion, suffers from some doubts. It's a subject I've talked a lot about with him. There is even something well-known, applied in Spain, *Variantes Castiços da Arquitectura Espanhola*, in which Goitia even tries to formally define some characteristics that he considers to be Spanish architecture, but which go all the way back to modernity; what would be interesting would be to know if there is any break at present.

I, for example, consider myself Portuguese. I have no doubt whatsoever. I swear on my chest that I am a Portuguese architect. "But why? Are you sure about that?", I'm sure. "How do you document?", document in the sense of writing a treatise on traditional Portuguese architecture, how do I correspond to that... It's a bit more than a feeling, but of which I'm absolutely sure. As Pessoa is a Portuguese poet, Antero de Quental is a Portuguese poet, Camões is a Portuguese poet, and Siza Vieira is a Portuguese architect. Why is Siza a Portuguese architect? It's even more complicated because I know I am; he's someone else; I can speak for myself, but I find it more difficult to speak for him. I think he's a Portuguese architect, although... You might say he's a Portuguese architect of the so-called Portuguese architects of a certain quality. I don't know if architecture in Portugal has ever reached the quality that it is reaching with him, which doesn't mean that it's not possible. The same thing happens with poetry. We have leading figures in universal poetry, recent ones, Camões, Pessoa, and a few others, and so we can also have leading figures in universal architecture, and Siza can be one of those. It's not the fact that he's a Portuguese man or that he creates Portuguese architecture that stops him from being...

Of course, if you ask him if he does Portuguese architecture voluntarily, he might say that he doesn't, I've heard that. This is a subject that is sickeningly treated everywhere. At the CIAM congress where Rogers presented the Velasca Tower, he gave Tange great praise, saying that Tange was starting his life; he was referring to the Government Palace in Tokyo, and Tange, acting disinterested (something that made a lot of impression on me) said "I don't pretend to be a Japanese architect, I just want to be a modern architect". Don't tell me that Tange is so naive and that he doesn't intend to be a Japanese architect and does not harm him. Now, sometimes, there's a certain coyness about it. I don't know what Siza would answer to this question; whether he intends to be a Portuguese architect, he might answer no. I don't know, but I think he is a Portuguese architect.

**Is this idea of Portuguese architecture something that stems from a certain national nostalgia, or a nationality value, or an identity, or is it something that can be related to a Portuguese procedure? In a situation in which there is no in-depth historical research among architects, and they even show a certain lack of faith in that component within their disciplinary specificity, I wonder: isn't there a risk of valuing as specific or as a component for specificity of national architecture, the valuing of a certain primitivism, of elementalism resulting from a voluntarist accompaniment of the large centres, of their flourishing cultures? As a small centre, what is left for us to cultivate nostalgia for the Portuguese?**

I think that the problem of identity is nowadays conscious, which means, as far as I am concerned, that it is indispensable. It's really a nostalgia.

Today it has been proved, finally, that this whole crazy movement of heritage, the whole movement of the creation of Europe, the Council of Europe, the European Community, etc., are basically a search for identities on a greater or lesser scale. Today, there is a great search for identities because it seems that we are in a world that is losing them, and curiously enough, the great national identities, the great regions and the small regions, I mean, the small identities, are starting to be cultivated. Regionalism, for example, today, on a national, regional scale, is also a cult of identity. It is likely that the fact of feeling this need may lead people to value minor factors as identity, factors that are even questionable in their quality. But I don't presume that what will give Portuguese architecture an identity are minor factors. Portuguese architecture has a certain character; why? Because it is timider, because it is more ignorant, because it is less modern, it doesn't contribute to the movement...

**It does not contribute, but the great historians come here to study it ...**

And I wonder, going back to the case of Siza, is Siza studied and so sought after because he is creating a model of international architecture? It is because he's a Portuguese architect. The case of Pessoa: Pessoa is a great poet, really. He's a man who says that to be Portuguese, you must be everything everywhere. This concept is that identity results from a great revelation, and national identity has to result, paradoxically, from knowing everything and everyone. Pessoa's heteronymy itself is a curious phenomenon of a type being identical to himself when he is many. This, paradoxically, is a need for identity. Heteronymy is a need for identity, for knowing oneself while being many and, moreover, for identifying oneself with situations that perhaps are not one's own, but which, in a diversified world of various identities, a type wants to be identical to others. This is possible.

I think that one of the interesting aspects of the modern world is a certain heteronymy that architects face in their professional practice. As is the case with poets and Pessoa's case is not unique, it is perhaps a more drawn-out case; several modern poets used heteronymy as a need for knowledge, and it follows that the historical factor has a certain importance as much for a varied identification as for recognition

of other identities, of meeting languages, contacts, etc. The truth is that this feeling exists today among architects when I recognise that Lisbon is not the same as Oporto, or Aveiro is not the same as Oporto, and I think I should use a language in Aveiro that I do not use in Oporto. When, for example (as happened to me in a building in Aveiro), an architect comes and says: "why don't you do this in exposed concrete?"; no, in Aveiro, I can't do it in exposed concrete because I think I should do concrete covered with marble or limestone, and that's what I did. But I can perhaps do fair-faced concrete in Oporto. Now, they tell me: "But what are these laws? Can you write a treaty?". I don't know.

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[MM – By the way we could continue the same theme, but particularise...

FT – Do you think it's worth?]

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**We can perhaps specify a few things starting from your case. You share a certain renewal of architecture, you share references that integrate you in a European generation: Rogers (although you are a little older), Cano Lasso, Coderch, but the architecture they make is quite different from yours. This has something to do with these local conditions of professional practice, or with this condition of being Portuguese, which gives you a different intentionality?**

I believe so. What I think is that it's maybe not as reasoned as that. I'm afraid of being vain by appearing to possess some things because I'll automatically be... other people from not having them... However, I know that I currently have within me a certain capacity for insertion and knowledge of situations that enable me to characterise the work and characterise the situations.

**One reference you insist on, especially in your writings, is the constant reference to man, to the "house of man". Would you like to explain a little how the "house of man" reflects an affinity with local conditions and, at the same time, the attempt to find some universality?**

I don't see any incompatibility – and I don't think we can see it – between a great universality that we all need to know and a strong identity. In fact, I suppose that is the thesis that Pessoa defends: finding identity in universality. And I think it is possible. I mean, we can't go back... Does this identity thing mean going back again to the small group, to the small region, to the small thing? It is not possible. We don't live in such a world; we live in a completely open world. I suppose that it is exactly this openness that is fatal, that implies that the "house of man" is, on the one hand, the world and, on the other hand, the house of man, the small house of man. I feel that this fact exists. You can say to me, "This one is crazy", because nobody would say this.



For example, this Porto/Lisbon problem. Nuno Portas tells me that this is all the same; everything is opening, and we are all the same. I don't think so; it is not about saying that we are better or worse, that is not the issue, or that we must be different. What I think is that we are equal, and I do not think it is a problem for us to cultivate this difference as long as it does not have the effect of creating enmities or problems of another order. I think it's possible to make that greatness compatible... because curiously enough, who are the architects who were all supposedly international, the top architectural standards in international architecture? Mr. Le Corbusier, Mr. Gropius, Mr. Mies van der Rohe. Gropius is 100% German, an international architect is German, he arrives in the United States and finds himself a bit of a mess, he becomes American, because the Americans put pressure on him, he gets rich and comes out an Americanised German. Mies van der Rohe...

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[MM I confess, possibly half of this..., it's my fault, I can't specify more objective questions..

FT I just get too scattered. The problem is writing this, you know? With the Spanish, despite everything, I concentrated more].

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**The idea of the “house of man” can also be associated with a suggestion of continuity. The propositional sense of the project is not inhibited by the permanent values of history, by the heritage of history; in a way, your work is more a poetics of ethics and less a poetics of invention. Nevertheless, your passion for Le Corbusier is immense. You often humbly say, “I don't have the capacity...”. It may be a problem of ability, but isn't it rather a problem of attitude?**

There probably is... Sometimes I wonder what is conservative – I won't say reactionary –, ethically or intellectually, about what I do. This probably is because I was educated a bit in this... and the things you are educated with are very strong. There are terrible, sometimes brutal, reactions to that, a bit paradoxical, or there's a permanent return to that feeling; it's probable that there's something in that sense, but what can I do? I can't do anything else. That there is indeed a great ethical sense in what I do and in what I say, in what I think, above all, that is true. I often say, it's a moral problem. I reduce problems to moral problems, even my relations with clients, certain acceptances, certain commitments, problems of respect for others, problems of dialogue, of not exercising a certain power. But I recognise that ethics gives a certain character and gives a certain form to solutions.

**How do problems arise, how do they evolve in the project's procedure? What is thought in the gestation of a form, in the resolution of a problem of space? What is it like? How do things start?**

I'm not fast. And I see that it is only now, at the age of 60/65 – something I often say, and I don't say jokingly, to encourage people of my age who have

not yet achieved something because it may come later – that I begin, for example, to formally interpret a programmatic intention, or a client, or an environment; to solve a problem in terms of synthesis – of initial synthesis and not of subsequent additions. I see that, at this moment, I can conceive with a certain capacity for synthesis, with a certain integration of factors – it has always been my dream. The dream of a person who wants to give things a certain identity must be to know and to integrate and synthesise quickly and, as far as possible, to encompass all the conditioning factors. Of course, this requires a large mental mechanism and a certain amount of experience, and I feel that I am only now beginning to understand this. I have the impression that, at this moment, I can do this, integrating problems of form, problems of the client – the colour of the client's eyes, or whether the client varnishes his nails or not – and I really can do this today. I think I can. I can understand a place, understand a client, understand a programme, and conceive in terms of unity and of the whole and, above all, something that worries me, the character of things, the identity of the solution: to give the solution a natural form, the natural forms in that sense of their own identity. No two sheets are the same; no two people are the same. It is not that romantic theory that the artist never repeats himself...

### **Do you draw a lot? Does drawing play an important role?**

I draw less than people think I do because I work so much intellectually. I do a big work of intellectual elaboration. I am not a person who moves very quickly into drawing, partly because I feel some responsibilities when drawing and I find it hard to draw things that I don't know if I am going to draw. I draw relatively little, and, in general, when I manage to draw things, they are already elaborated and schematised.

**Today, there is a relatively strong tendency in architecture, namely in some discourse of architectural criticism, to value inspiration as a critical category of the project's discourse. Is inspiration anything that exists in your design process, in the process that seems to reveal a capacity to rationalise everything, all the factors that might be a motive for creation? Is inspiration something that tells you something? Is inspiration a product of knowledge?**

Inspiration... not much, as that vague thing of the inspired artist. I like to understand why things are like that. And I think that what can be called inspiration or sensitivity, or this or that, has an incomprehensible pattern. They may not be under control at any given time, but then shows up. I often recognize that the explanation may appear a few years later. In fact, it happens to all of us. For example, critics and friends discover things that we didn't [...], didn't understand, didn't conceive intellectually; things called... I won't say a *posteriori*, but factors that entered the judgement and elaboration but that are not conscious. There are many factors that are not... and that evidently instinct or intuition integrates



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and then comes to be discovered. There are many things. I remember the Feira Market: after it was built there were some criticisms and things that I didn't give much thought to at the time. In the building of Aveiro, for example, there are a certain number of relationships; some were considered, and others I discovered later. I can say that when I go there, I discover new things.

So, there is some intellectual work that it is possible to reason about, and there is some work of instinct, of sensitivity. Is that inspiration? I don't know.

**Throughout your path as an architect, the Campo Alegre Plan, the Vila da Feira Market, the Cedro School, the Aveiro projects, the Convento da Costa, Refóios, is there anything in that process that could be elected as a kind of constant a continuation? Are there factors that are interconnected and maintain a certain sense of continuity of research?**

I think so; I think there is some apparent difference between the solutions, which, as far as I'm concerned, is more an attempt to identify each of them rather than the result of doing them differently. If you see any of those solutions, I think they have, in my humble opinion, a certain character of their own; they have their own image, they are easily identified.

I can quickly caricature the Feira Market, I can quickly caricature things from Aveiro (in a good way), or the Convent of Costa, which means that they are products – I think – with a certain strength, with a certain character. As proof, curiously, I can tell you that the Feira Market must have 5 or 6 children, similar markets. It's

Fig. 7

Fernando Távora on a building site (FIMS/AFT).

curious, it is a market that has left a deep impression on me, although it was also inspired by a market by Januário Godinho, the one in Ovar (when I was looking at markets, it was the market that impressed me most), but, despite everything, using it, I ran away from it more than the markets that came after did.

I think there is at least that continuity of identity. Some marks probably make works appreciably different from one another, but at the same time, unify them in that sense of there being an identity. Then, I think that there is in all of them something that is proper of what I do, which is a certain sobriety, that has to do with moral problems, problems of the economy, problems of containment, problems of not exaggerating, not theatricalizing solutions, not facilitating the temptation, or the theatricalization of solutions in order to obtain certain successes that are more or less reviewable, more or less sympathetic to the critics, etc. Not that criticism is bad and therefore considers these values, but because there are people who, despite everything, consider that this is important. I don't consider them important.

Then, for example, if we look at it from a formal point of view, I don't know, there's a certain... fatness of forms, a certain density of forms, which is something I do... I have hands like that; our works are similar to ours; there is something more that I think is common in all these works: it's a certain carnal expression, a certain sensuality I think there is. It's also something that I think is common, that has to do with me. And really that moral problem, of a certain moralism, of a certain...

**Another aspect that seems important in your work, accompanying a certain unconcern with an aprioristic sense of invention, is the valorisation of composition. The new one sought a break with composition and insisted on an idea of process, and of project. Is composition an important aspect in your design process?**

I suppose it is.

In the way I do things, I feel this, a certain absence of what is often talked about in modern architecture, a certain sense of dynamics of things... of ruptures that I don't have. My things are, in general, quite stable, quite calm, this is very characteristic of the whole composition and the whole classical concept. Why are they like that? I don't know. Or maybe because I have a vision... I mean, I must say that one of the things that concerns me in modern society is instability: I am very sensitive to this permanent instability of everything, the instability of families, the instability of marriage, the instability of fashions, of traffic. I am a person who... They might say to me: "You're a terrible reactionary; you're a devil's conservative". Maybe I am. I have a sense of progress that is probably not achievable in this world of tremendous instability.

I don't know if the composition doesn't come exactly from trying to stabilise situations a little. I am a man who always tries to stabilise situations; I don't try to aggravate situations.



**In the sense of prolonging the life of situations? For example, in the Convent of Santa Marinha da Costa, the knowledge of its history to understand the life of the building to find a possibility of extension; the composition can have here something of a tool or drawing technique, for that concern of prolonging the life of things, an extension that contains the germ of transformation?**

Yes, prolong, but prolong according to a certain concept.

How is it possible to prolong with something that predisposes a certain dynamic but rather is endowed with a certain instability? I suppose that is a position more of a reaction than of contribution; let's say it is a contribution in the negative, of trying to stabilise a situation. Today it is fashionable to defend the modern city in terms of rupture – the city is made of bits and pieces. I still haven't adapted to the city; I must live it because... but don't compare that city with the stable, traditional city, of the great composition; I can't, I can't stand that kind of city, the city of bits, the shattered city, rising here and there. If I am entrusted with a city, for a contribution, albeit of a small building for the city, I will try to stabilise the city and not aggravate it, creating new situations.

**Now, there is a tendency to value eclecticism. There is more and more talk of artistic procedure in architecture, more and more talk of form, of decorated architecture, of fragmented architecture. If we speak more and more of form and less of space, is there a problem here, a crisis of vocation, an incapacity, or difficulty in renewing the skills of architecture?**

Perhaps not so much in relation to theory, but in relation to practice, to the consequences of theory. I think that we are entering into an excessive fragmentation, an excessive personalization, I would even say a certain immorality of architecture, a certain shamelessness. It seems that this new theory or these new theories allow the practice of incompetence, the practice of meaninglessness, the practice of anti-social, the practice of immoral (almost). I think it is interesting that architecture acquires a character, something that has not been incompatible in so-called international architecture. Architecture has never been international. Even in the times when that theory existed, I don't think that happened. But today I understand perfectly well that one tries to identify architecture, that one tries to circumstantialise, to define the factors that can... in a certain form, in a certain moment. But I don't think that this allows everything. It allows the application of a concept that can be universalized. It is a universal concept, but it has to contain quality in itself.

What I don't see is that what is currently being done contains quality. For me, a large part of the solutions does not contain quality, which probably means that, if they do not contain quality, they do not fulfil this need for identification and characterization. What I see is a tremendous... I'm probably forcing this comment, thinking of the Portuguese situation, which, probably and despite everything, is sensibly different from many other situations in other countries. I tend to generalize, so I may be thinking too much about

what happens in Portugal. I think that what is happening in Portugal, from what I can see now, is a bit like that: this tendency towards fragmentation, towards decoration, towards the predominance of form over space, is not leading to anything; it is leading to a tremendous disorder, to a tremendous personalization of things, to a kind of anti-social architecture. That's what I see as the consequence...

**In our specific case, that of Porto, it is argued that the architect is the specialist in non-specialisation. Although this concept is not very clear and not very theorised, it has been a good starting point. But to what extent does this territory of the architect not need to be revised in order to achieve an ever wider and more demanding involvement in objective intervention in the city? We are moving towards a progressive specialisation, even to deepen the materials that the architect works with or produces himself. For example, will the problems of the city be masterable in the same way as one masters a small building? The design exercise, the construction, the city, the theory, or the history, despite everything, do they not admit a certain specialism, do they not admit differences in the techniques, in the methods, in the objects, and therefore, also in terms of training, does this pose particular problems?**

I have been thinking about this and I think that it might happen, that greater specialisation might be necessary. In fact, it really happens because theory is one thing, and practice is another. One verifies that of us in our professional action, each of us is led, either by himself or by the society that chooses him, to a certain nature of work and, therefore, this position of the generalist is a little theoretical. I, in fact, say that we are specialist generalists in architecture. What I generalise is the concept of architecture, from the door handle to the city, and, at that point, I think we are specialist generalists in architecture. But in practice, I suppose that's happening.

There are architects' solutions in which one feels, at certain levels of the project (for example, in the design of objects), a capacity but no professionalism. If the architect were a professional, he could..., but he is not.

You could also say that the contribution of a non-professional is interesting in the sense that the professional has a certain tendency to become bureaucratic. For example, design is loaded with this, with a confident professionalism and a certain amount of over-designing. It's a bit like what I was saying earlier about architecture – industrial design needs to be invaded by people who aren't designers to give it a certain freshness and take away that thing... It's a bit like what happens with landscaping – landscapers create landscaping that, for me, has too much landscape; we needed other people who were not landscapers, gardeners, architects, etc., who could change that a bit.

Because specialisation has this problem – people begin to acquire increasingly more decisive, cruder, more systematic, and more immortal techniques for solutions. There's a certain paradox here: on the one hand, specialisation

has a certain advantage because it dominates certain factors that a non-specialised practice doesn't; on the other hand, a non-professionalised practice, as long as it obviously involves relatively close subjects, such as landscaping, architecture, urbanism, industrial design. It's not a question of doing medicine or taking out teeth; that will be at a greater distance, but within this area, I think it's good to exchange pennants and experiences. Although I recognise that there is a certain... the problem itself... For instance, I defend that everyone should be able to do heritage restoration work. But then, when I start to think about it, I say that there are people who know little about this, which means that they make some mistakes, which means that some problems probably need to be investigated more deeply.

The truth is that we see in education some tendency towards specialisation, through masters, doctorates, post-graduate courses. We have already had this tendency in the School, in the 5th year, of 3 or 4 specialisations, although within the practice of architecture.

**Teaching is an important facet of your professional life. In the paths that the Escola do Porto is taking, has there not been a certain imposition or a concern to make drawing the centre of our procedure? A centrality, maybe, that might contribute to a certain emptying of the creative synthesis of architecture, a centrality more for the problems of form and less for the impacts of that form. I'm asking if eventually, the questions of design have not distracted us from other important questions in the field of architecture: the architect's techniques, the production processes of the whole built system, and the problems of the city. Haven't we been going through some indecision about the problem of synthesis?**

I don't know if this is the result of an excessive preoccupation with drawing or if drawing is something that is never enough. It won't be too much drawing, but there will be too few other subjects. You could say that the problem is the length of the course – it's 5 or 6 years, how are we going to do the subjects? I recognise that there is too much drawing, in a certain sense, in the sense that I was saying there is too much landscaping, or too much design, or too much architecture. But I think that drawing is never too much in the sense of a manifestation of intelligence, of a manifestation of creativity. What we do is design. We really are designers in the true sense. The fact that we are designers doesn't mean that we don't have to consider many other factors. Besides, there are bad designers, aren't there? Because drawing this way or that way doesn't mean drawing well. That is another problem; they are universal problems, and they have always been there. There is always one person's way of drawing; this is visible among us, and we know to which case I refer. That is fatal.

Not all people have enough personality, and it doesn't even matter because you can fall into the opposite: everyone wants to have their own personality, and we're doing a passing of models that doesn't matter at all – they are



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personalities that don't exist. What I say is that sometimes there is too much design. And what I feel about the Oporto School is that it is not about drawing too much. It may be some badly directed drawing, and, on the other hand, I really think that there are other constraints on drawing that are not only drawing but also missing, namely the problems of construction. How can you design without building? How can you build what you are drawing? I think there is a certain lack of a sense of construction, and the sense of construction is really an indispensable sense both for drawing and for architecture. We are builders; without drawn construction, we don't exist. We are designers and architectural theoreticians, but our profession is exercised in relation to engineers. The engineer builds, but the engineer, as an engineer, builds with solidity; he doesn't build with quality; we have to build with solidity, for that, we call the engineer, and, besides that, we have to build with quality and that quality naturally implies a great design quality So I think we in the school, and in Porto, are suffering from a bit too much design, but...

**Let's say that in the teaching of architecture, there is a certain specificity, that of architecture, and emphasising the problems of drawing is done to sensitise the student to a method and not exactly to channel or to force a certain world of references, which evidently creates some problems of idea transmission. What do you think is important to emphasise?**

Fig. 8

Fernando Távora and Alvaro Siza visiting the site where the Casa de Chã would be built in Boa Nova in the late 1950s (FIMS/AFT).

Drawing is firstly a process of creation and secondly a process of transmission. In the case of the architect, it is a process of transmission of knowledge – it is by drawing that we transmit our knowledge. I suppose that drawing should have these two clearly marked vectors: on the one hand, a vector of creation, of understanding the process of creation and the translation of the process of creation itself; and on the other hand, it should have a clarity that allows it to be a weapon, a service, an element of information of conception.

**But the problem I would raise is how one associate, above all, how one makes it clear, in a teaching process, since drawing is above all an instrument or a technique – perhaps I like the term better – of artistic procedure, how does it go beyond a purely subjective development, and how does it associate information? Because there is information that does not match or that is not strictly restricted to drawing, and that is not experienced exclusively through drawing. How does one help the student to produce that synthesis between drawing and knowledge, and how does drawing itself become knowledge? I think this is a fundamental problem.**

I don't know how that, from a teaching method point of view, can be achieved. You ask how it can be achieved...

The syllabus in the Faculty reflects a hegemony of the project; there is clearly a hegemony of project time in which the project professor is a kind of "Tarzan". For example, one figure I immediately remember is Gregotti. Gregotti is a man who has a very intense experience of the different components of the disciplinary territory, of history, of the city, of construction, of drawing and, at the same time, he short-circuits this with the arts, the sciences, thought, everything in the artistic movement; he is a man who travels a lot, who knows different realities, and all of this intersects, all of this is channelled towards an intense experience and into project work. Our school is somewhat restricted in terms of that experience. Apparently, there is a great companionship – I'm not saying there isn't – but it is a very centripetal, very autistic companionship. This apparently devalues or isolates us in relation to that process that wants to relate everything and, therefore, immediately puts us outside an important portion of experiences and information. If we want to channel into an artistic procedure, how does its process invigorate, how does it open up, how does it enrich itself, if we are very restricted, very individual, very aware of our own heritage? But at the same time, we want to open up, we want to reproduce, we want to transmit this idea of ours. How is this done? I mean, especially in a context where the student is more and more invaded by information, is more and more imbued with this spirit of plurality that today's times insinuate, doesn't a platform that starts from such an excessive valorization of its own heritage run the risk of limiting creative freedom? That is, of almost imposing a vision of architecture, of almost imposing an architectural procedure and, therefore, of hegemonizing, in a certain way, the creative sensibility of each one?



I wouldn't say that. I would say that if what you say happens, which is a certain hegemony of drawing, that is a certain vision of drawing and not a more global vision of architectural drawing... I suppose this happens by giving the design some... – that's what I suppose you feel – little consistency, a little foundation because it's a design that doesn't include – as I suppose it should – all the factors that should be introduced. I suppose it's a design that ends up being freer, easier to fake, less authentic, less conditioned, less pressured, less aware, and less intelligent.

**The student, at this moment, is invaded with a great amount of information. This information, especially in a quality magazine, in a generic way, translates different artistic procedures and different foundations. What I ask is this: in a vision like ours, where, despite everything, we start from very precise references, doesn't a good part of the student's incapacity to assimilate or associate to his drawing procedure a procedure of fundamentals reflect this difficulty we have in grasping other information, in transmitting him the fundamentals that are associated to certain types of images? Doesn't this, deep down, raise the problem of transmission?**

As far as I am concerned, this does not call into question the need for drawing. What does call into question is what kind of drawing and how to teach it. Basically, it's the method: how to teach drawing, what I suppose that leads to... I think that this would require a more integrated, more – how can I put it? – related so that drawing can, as far as possible, translate all the knowledge that the student should have into design and then into information. What happens is that drawing, if it is not grounded, filtered through the student, the school, etc., translates knowledge or information or interprets things that are false, the reasons for which the student does not understand; it is a bit like drawing for drawing's sake, it is a form for form's sake, not grounded form. I suppose that this is a difficult goal to achieve. The school is probably not enough; the student must also have a certain professional experience. I wouldn't say suitability, but it is something that has a lot to do – in my opinion – with the integration of teaching in the school. How do you teach the student in such a way that thematic – if he has one –, construction – if he has –, sociology – if he has –, urbanism – if he has one –, architecture obviously affects the quality and the conception of the drawing; and the drawing is the result of all this.

**In many public interventions, namely student exams, academic exams, and colloquiums, the Architect remarks or confronts the problem: so, we saw this, we saw all these parameters, I appreciated it, and now? What future? Where do we stand? I would now like to ask a final question: how do you see the evolution of architecture at this moment? How do you see the situation of architecture today? How do you see the paths of architecture?**

In Portugal? In general? I must say that I am more concerned about the Portuguese case because I am closer to it. In relation to Portuguese architecture,

I am concerned, but I am concerned in relation to what I see as the results in general, especially younger people, either because I am completely out of touch and not integrated, and ignorant, and out of date, or because it seems to me that architecture is – as was spoken of earlier – in a process of pulverisation that is not a process of socialisation. A pulverisation process that is, in my opinion, something like “every man for himself”. There’s a boat, people have fallen into the water, there’s no chance of getting back to the boat, and everyone sticks their arms out and tries to swim through small, pulverised works. I don’t really see it like that, apart, of course, from one or two cases that save the national honour. It is well known and recognised that Portugal only has a serious international accreditation in one case – also a curious case – which is that of Siza Vieira. I often ask myself if Siza translates the national climate or not, if he has anything to do with the national climate. I think he does, but I find it strange that other people don’t. We probably weren’t lucky enough to have more people of that quality. But a man who, despite everything, translates the national climate because he is alone because he is the only one; maybe he is the only one, maybe he is... We are in a rather strange situation: a great mediocrity of architects – I think –, especially in relation to the works that I see, then some architects of a certain reputation and really of quality, and then, finally, that figure that has become almost emblematic, recognised by all of us, as a figure of international standing.

But what worries me more than architecture, I must say, is architecture in its urbanism form because it seems to me that bad architecture cannot resist good urbanism; that is, good urbanism can do a lot with bad architecture. What seems to me is that we, despite everything, are still worse at the level of the association of buildings, at the level of town planning, than at the level of architecture. That’s what really worries me because I don’t see... And the level of town planning is a level that, for example from the School point of view, is way beyond us because there are other interests, there are other factors that obviously condition architecture, but which, despite everything, condition another scale more strongly – political factors, etc. They condition architecture, everyone knows, but they condition urbanism much more, and I don’t see any kind of concern about that. Nobody worries about that. The Architects’ Association itself I see as being concerned with architecture; I think it’s interesting, and I think it’s important, but I don’t see it being very concerned with urban planning problems. And although it organises some competitions, I would find it interesting that, just like these exhibitions related to architecture, they should also be related to urbanism problems, to measure the strengths of the country. The impression I have is that the country is in a state of serious formal decomposition. I don’t know how it will recover or how long it will take because I don’t know how much longer this situation will deteriorate. This is really my greatest concern now: I see that the country is “on the brink of ruin”, in a state of complete mediocrity, in terms of scale, human problems, etc.

Really, from the point of view of buildings, something is going to be done. There are many things that don’t interest me, don’t touch me, are of little significance, but they are small things. What really worries me a lot is the problem of

urbanism because the problem of urbanism includes all levels of achievements. When we talk about architecture, we talk about the architecture of architects and the architecture of architects, as you know, in Portugal is relatively scarce. If anything can control other, non-architectural architecture, the so-called 50, 60 or 80% or whatever they say there is, it must be urbanism, it has to be the general discipline that will condition that... And that general discipline, the awareness of the existence or absence of that discipline, I don't see it existing. What I see is that people say, "Ah, it's the situation, it's not possible, the country is undergoing a very big evolution, it's not possible, nothing is possible". I don't see that these are problems that are discussed in public; the scandals of the Ministry of Finance, or of the ministers, or of the Ministry of Health are discussed more. But really, if there's no scandal to the point that people can't take advantage of it to "make their own problems worse"... I don't see anyone else worrying about these kinds of problems, and that's something that really worries me.

Another thing that worries me is the problem of the mutual disinterest of schools among themselves, schools of architecture. And one thing that strikes me, as we are in a situation with some difficulties, with some problems, is the lack of interest that schools have for each other. The schools don't try to associate; they don't try to foster a certain number of relationships, to gather experience, to communicate experience. We live completely isolated. We are in a situation, Portugal is at this moment in a situation where each one takes care of his own life, and we expect God Our Lord, or Cavaco Silva, to take care of everybody. It is a kind of situation where people are satisfied but without much reason to be satisfied because deep down, nobody is satisfied and, at least in those areas that concern us most, things are worrying.

Anyway, we won't be here...