

Álvaro Siza

The Continuous Construction of Memories

Contínua construção de Memórias de Amanhã

On 9 May 2003, the IUAV University of Venice, on an initiative proposed and supported by Francesco dal Co, awarded Fernando Távora with the Laurea Honoris Causa. The ceremony in the Sala dello Scrutinio of the Doge's Palace was conducted by the Rector Marino Folin. Three laudationes accompanied the ceremony held respectively by Carlo Magnani, Dean of the Faculty of Architecture (Fernando Távora, Casabella, no. 713 (July 2003): 6), Eduardo Souto de Moura (Fernando Távora e la natura delle cose naturali, Casabella, no. 713 (July 2003): 7) and Álvaro Siza ("Doutoramento em Veneza", in Álvaro Siza, 01 Textos, edited by Carlos Campos Morais (Porto: Civilização Editora, 2009): 293-295). The Lectio magistralis delivered by Távora is published in this issue of HPA.

In the text of his laudatio Siza refers, in succession, to the following works by Fernando Távora: the Holiday House in Ofir ("a small house... that suddenly materialised the imprecise intuitions of myself and those of my generation"); the Cedar School in Vila Nova de Gaia ("a public building on a sleepy periphery – an association of contemporaneity and continuity, of tradition and invention"); the Pousada of S. Marinha ("restoration of a convent restoration in which... the naturalness and heresy of a 'new architecture' emerged"), the Barredo recovery plan in Porto ("run-down neighbourhoods in Porto, a moment in which the architect's social responsibility was fully assumed"), the text O problema da Casa Portuguesa published in Porto in 1947 ("a revolutionary reunion with the past") and the tower built next to Porto Cathedral known as House of 24 ("a great little jewel").



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Your Excellency, the Rector of the IUAV University of Venezia

Mr President of the Faculty

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is no coincidence that the mythical Faculty of Architecture in Venice is honouring Fernando Távora by conferring on him the degree of Professor Honoris Causa.

This is a school where the teaching of architecture has always had History as its essential reference point; the History that has built a city where Western and Eastern cultures intersect, where the universality of architecture is affirmed with Andrea Palladio, where geographical specificity can be read in every House, in every street, in every arm of water; where minor architecture and sublime architecture – if it is legitimate to distinguish – have complemented each other over the centuries, mutually dependent, in an incomparably compact fabric. A city also made of dust and mud and golden mist, where you can breathe utopia and permanence, dream and adequacy.

The honour of saying a few words about the work and personality of Fernando Távora in this splendid Venetian venue overwhelms and moves me. Memories inevitably arise, but talking about Fernando Távora does not invite nostalgia but rather the awareness of the shared present and the appetite for the future.

The evidence of Fernando Távora's importance as a pedagogue, as a catalyst for renewing tendencies, within the Carlos Ramos School and afterwards, has somehow, I think, postponed attention to the Architect's work, of which he never wanted to be a herald; work that has therefore sometimes been referred to, always with respect, as an indispensable reference for understanding the evolution of Portuguese architecture.

If you look closely, Fernando Távora's not-so-easy work reveals itself to be universally contemporary in a country that was one of doldrums and suffocated anxiety. It reveals itself successively as an act of reflection, continuity and subversion in a counterpoint of projects "in a state of happiness" and suspended decomposition.

From this perspective, we can understand the complex coherence of the succession of projects and constructions carried out by the Architect and his diverse and passionate activities – from traveller to collector, from builder to educator. Activities that filled my youth (and the passing years) with continuous surprises and surprises.

First and foremost, I remember the tranquillity and patience with which any student's work was corrected, and then the enthusiastic sharing of experiences and discoveries, reporting on what was discussed at a CIAM meeting, the experience of a ZEN garden or the design of the Ronchamp door handle.

I remember the appearance of a small house, designed outside the studio and almost in secret, a house that suddenly materialised the imprecise intuitions of

myself and those of my generation, or a public building on a sleepy periphery – an association of contemporaneity and continuity, of tradition and invention.

Later on, I remember the restoration of a convent in which, based on rigorous archaeological research, the naturalness and heresy of a “new architecture” emerged, capable of keeping the building’s centuries-old History alive and visible, or the projects to restore run-down neighbourhoods in Porto, a moment in which the Architect’s social responsibility was fully assumed under adverse conditions, without calculation and at a cost.

I also remember the appearance of a small youth book – *A Casa Portuguesa* – a revolutionary reunion with the past, or a great little jewel, the redesign of the *House of 24*. And many other things I won’t say.

The recent *House of 24* project was built on the foundations of a medieval building that has disappeared, next to Porto Cathedral, from the few traces that remained and vague historical accounts, provoking immediate and violent controversy (always or almost always complete architecture generates estrangement and irritation).

Interviewed in the middle of the storm, Fernando Távora baffled everyone by simply saying: I was surprised myself.

I don’t know if he meant it or if it was ironic.

I dare say that, this time, I wasn’t surprised.

I knew before I saw the first strokes that a place like that and an accumulation of History like that, placed at its disposal, were ideal conditions for the emergence of something that old cities desperately need today: a sign of vitality, a challenge to courage in the face of timidity and conformism.

Fernando Távora engraved it in the heart of the city, an intimate and yet wide-open doorway between the past and what is to come.

This work, being recent, is not yet a memory; it will be, as a relevant moment in his career and teaching, as seen by this disciple of his: the continuous construction of *Tomorrow’s Memories*, *Memory* and open eyes and heart, serenity and desire, being instruments.

That work and that teaching are recognised and celebrated today.

Nothing could be more just and significant, as confirmed by the initiative of IUAV University of Venice.

I feel personally grateful, and in saying this, I feel that I am not alone.

29 April 2003

Álvaro Siza

Excelentíssimo Senhor Reitor do Instituto Universitário de Arquitectura de Venezia

Exmº Sr. Presidente da Faculdade

Senhoras e Senhores,

Não é um acaso ser a mítica Faculdade de Arquitectura de Venezia a honrar Fernando Távora, conferindo-lhe o grau de Professor Honoris Causa.

É esta uma Escola onde sempre o Ensino da Arquitectura manteve como referência essencial a História; a História que foi construindo uma cidade onde se cruzam culturas do ocidente e do oriente, onde a universalidade da Arquitectura se afirma com Andrea Palladio, onde a especificidade geográfica se lê em cada casa, em cada rua, em cada braço de água; onde a arquitectura menor e a sublime – se é legítimo distinguir – se complementam ao longo dos séculos, mutuamente dependentes, num tecido incomparavelmente compacto. Uma cidade feita também de pó e de lama e de névoa doirada, onde se respira utopia e permanência, sonho e adequação.



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A honra que me é concedida de pronunciar algumas palavras sobre a obra e a personalidade de Fernando Távora, neste espaço esplendido de Venezia, desvanece-me e emociona-me. Despertam as recordações, inevitavelmente; mas falar de Fernando Távora não convida à nostalgia, antes à consciência do presente partilhado e ao apetite do devir.

A evidência da importância de Fernando Távora como pedagogo, como catalisador de tendências renovadoras, no interior da Escola de Carlos Ramos e depois, foi de algum modo, julgo eu, adiando a atenção à obra do Arquitecto, da

Fig. 1

Drawing by Álvaro Siza signed with the dedication "For Fernando Távora", Assuan September 1984.