

# Outmoded Lesson

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*Outmoded Lesson, Fernando Távora, Didactics of Architecture, Drawing, Design Process*

## /Abstract

This text was taken from a notebook by Francisco Barata dated July 2012. According to Mariana Sá, who is carrying out doctoral research on the work of the architect who died prematurely in 2018, these are notes for a lecture that were part of the material that Barata was accumulating and elaborating in view of the Prova de Agregação at Faup, an academic task that was actually carried out in February 2016. It is therefore not a finished text, with defined terms and program, but rather a text under construction from which inserts and notes have been omitted, windows open to hypothetical developments, which it might be interesting to analyse elsewhere but which in this publication would make reading and understanding the underlying concepts difficult and not very fluent.

Having said this necessary premise, it is important to add that this lecture, despite the freedom of concatenation of thoughts typical of an outline in search of a definitive form, is structured around three clearly identified concepts: on the didactics of architecture, on drawing, on the design process. As a transversal background to the three concepts and the reflection that connects them, there is a central question: what path should Porto's school take, his school on the model and experience of which he reflects in the text, concluding, in the footsteps of Fernando Távora's teaching, that the task of every "good professor is to be able to select and transmit what remains of ancient knowledge, to create restlessness, to open debates, new doors, new paths".

## /Author

**Francisco Barata Fernandes**  
Architect, PhD

Francisco Barata Fernandes (Porto, 1950-2018), an architect trained at the School of Architecture in Porto (ESBAP), collaborated with Fernando Távora for several years before setting up his own professional practice. He was a lecturer at what in 1979 had become the Faculty of Architecture (FAUP) where he obtained his doctorate and held the roles of President of the Governing and Scientific Councils and Coordinator of the Doctorate course in Architecture and Architectural Heritage. He has been a visiting professor in several Faculties of Architecture in various European countries and in Brazil and has published works, projects, research and essays in many international journals. He was a member of the General Council of the Marques da Silva Foundation, at which – by decision of his wife Madalena Pinto da Silva, a participant in his research and professional and teaching activities – his archive is now, after his sudden death in 2018, kept.

I'd like my lesson to look "outmoded", and therefore always current and active! [...]

Depending on how you understand the work of architecture, the role of the architect and the discipline of architecture, this is how you organise your teaching. It's a collective work. All the examples I'm interested in are like this – from the Bauhaus to the Porto School, via the experiences of Milan, Barcelona, Glasgow, "Switzerland" – teamwork.

It's important to "explain" that the fact that we talk about the school-atelier relationship at our School doesn't actually mean that the school was a kind of office or vice versa. It means, above all, that the sense of "profession" was always present, perhaps as a "technical school", which means that a profession is taught. You don't teach architecture; you teach how to be an architect. In the same way you don't teach science, you teach what it means to be a scientist.

There are phrases with a peculiar sense of opportunity. A teacher saying that "Architecture is not taught, it is learnt" is a kind of emergency exit from a complicated situation. Firstly, if you learn, who teaches you? If you learn by yourself, then what are you doing at school?

This is also why the discipline has changed its name from Composition to Architecture to Project. This is a great improvement from the point of view of architectural theory and criticism, as well as the project itself. In the first case, the understanding of the architect's profession as an exercise in aesthetics of composition through drawing has been overcome, as an exercise in semiotics through the image and the work; on the other hand, the concept of Project has been enriched beyond the practical's vision, the techno-constructive and regulatory perspective to which the work of Architecture is linked.

Thus, it is easy to see how the choices of teaching model, pedagogical strategies and practices are decisive in the training of a new craftsman/artist, in the transmission of the knowledge of the profession. [...]

In this sense, it's important to say that at this School, the teaching of Project and not of Architecture presupposes years duly articulated and integrated. [...] This process has undergone adjustments, periodic and permanent venting, criticism, occasional manifestations of personal affirmation, growth crises, and phenomena inherent to the consolidation of Schools and not Academies. In these, there are always those who indicate the best direction to follow and those who follow it. In the Schools we try to clarify where we want to go and why, although we know there will always be several ways to do it. [...]

Design today corresponds not only to a vast field of options but also to a long journey of experimentation and critical reflection. Information technology presents new instrumental possibilities, new "processes" of thought/reasoning, and new supports for form and introduces new perspectives on this process. We are living in a critical moment. On the one hand, we have a huge supply of tools, new means, new clientele, new criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of design, new aesthetic standards. This does not mean,

as it always does in art, that previous products are outdated (unlike in science, where products go to the museum or the rubbish bin). This sense of the “eternal” continuity of the work of art – for those who realise the transcendence of this quality –, makes it a supreme responsibility to be able to pass on the knowledge that will allow this specific nature of the artistic and architectural fact to be perpetuated.

Drawing produced by computerised means, although initially confined to so-called “technical drawing”, has since the last decade expanded into other domains whose nature and boundaries are neither easy nor simple to characterise by discipline.

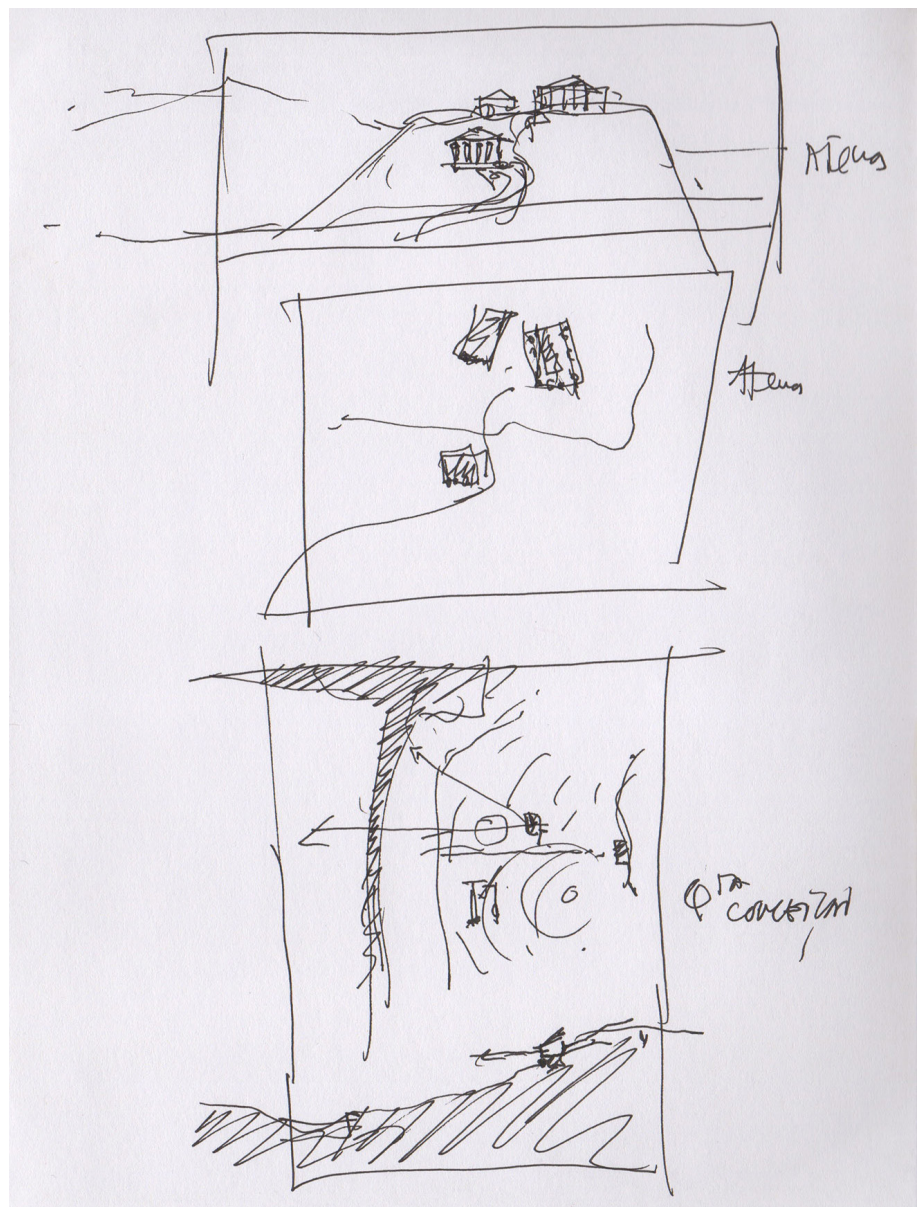
In the School’s 2nd year Project class, the drawing used in the project exercises continues to be carried out

without the aid of computerised means, as long as there is no properly structured thinking supported by a pedagogical practice proposal that maintains the integrated relationship between project and drawing that exceptional teachers of both subjects such as Alexandre Alves Costa and Alberto Carneiro (in the 2nd year) and Sergio Fernandez and Joaquim Vieira (in the 1st year) have laboriously and persistently managed to create.

The project process, which means a process of drawing, reflection, information and experimentation, always moves first and foremost (not in the final analysis) according to Man, the Man who inhabits; the Man who inhabits the house and the city.

By recognising the project process’s value, conditions are created to permanently improve the quality of the space organised for human habitation.

In schools that focus on the final product of the project, the discussion concentrates on the possibilities of variations and adjustments to the image of



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Fig. 1

Francisco Barata, 2013 sketch from another notebook, in which the Acropolis of Athens in elevation and plan and the Quinta da Conceição in plan and section appear as explanatory examples of the ontological and didactic relationship between classical Greek architecture and contemporary architecture in Távora’s work and thought.

the form and the model of the form, taking second place to questions of programme control, constructive choices and the correct relationship with the place. In these circumstances, some of today's architectural theories that individualise or/ and autonomise certain architectural elements of the future work, appropriating and recreating a new concept of "skin", are of great opportunity. This is not an innovative aspect. Since the "Mannerist" period, once the typological matrix had been stabilised, work had been done on the "façade". In fact, the old expression "this is just a façade" has never been more appropriate than it is today for the architecture that is being built.

What matters to a good teacher is being able to select and pass on what remains of ancient knowledge. To create disquiet, open debate, new "doorways", new "paths".



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Fig. 2

Francisco Barata, Bernardo José Ferrão (standing), Jorge Barros and Fernando Távora (seated) in a 1970s photo in front of a backdrop at a folk festival.