

The Pedagogical Value of the Organisation of Space. Founding Role and Continuity of Fernando Távora's Thinking

Architectural Pedagogy, Architecture and Circumstance, Intervention on Built Heritage, Portuguese Architecture, School of Porto

/Abstract

The importance of Fernando Távora's text, *Da Organização do Espaço*, is recognised in the context of Portuguese architectural culture, but not yet fully investigated internationally. The contribution aims to define the background within which the text was born and published and, more generally, to relate the peculiar condition of this book to the more articulated framework of experiences, relations and ties that characterise the multifaceted figure of the Portuguese master. The circumstances in which the young architect and lecturer found himself at the time of writing this theoretical reflection and the influences coming from his activity in the international sphere are analysed in depth. The intention is therefore to reread the theoretical reflection, rooting it on the one hand in the design experimentation carried out by Távora, and on the other hand in the definition of the pedagogical model that made the School of Porto celebrated. This to relate the specific experience of this book to the contemporary condition of teaching in schools of architecture, recognising in it an interpretation of strong topicality, alternative to the dominant tendencies of sectorialisation of architectural teaching and practice.

The humanistic basis of architecture, therefore, is understood as the possibility of anchoring the discipline to a concept of culture understood in a broad sense, which calls architects to their responsibility in giving substance to common aspirations. The nexus between the organisation of space and its rootedness to place, a repository of material heritage and immaterial memories, translates the tension between nature and artifice through the synthesis of the architectural project.

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Currently she gives lessons and takes part in international conventions and seminars. She writes articles and essays, contributing to series on architecture as well as international journals. She conducts research with particular attention to the “other modernity” poetics and to the tension between theme, figuration and place.

Relevant publications are the monograph *Classicismo di Frontiera. Sigurd Lewerentz e la Cappella della Resurrezione* (Padova: Il Poligrafo 2014) and the volume *Ricostruzione Inventario Progetto*, edited together with Gundula Rakowitz (Padova: Il Poligrafo 2018). In 2021 she translated into Italian and edited Fernando Távora's book, *Da Organização do Espaço* (Milan: nottetempo 2021); in May 2023 she organised and curated the conference at the Politecnico di Milano: *TÁVORA 100. In continuità. Pensiero e opera*, with Martina Landsberger, Angelo Lorenzi, Stefano Perego.



When Fernando Távora left his teaching position at the FAUP (Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto) in 1993, the school's Directive Board greeted – *até sempre* – what they considered one of the founding fathers with a small publication¹, which constitutes the first piece in that rich corpus of testimonies and studies on the master's work, which has been continuously updated even in recent times.

It contains: a note by Alexander Alves Costa, in his role as President of the Directive Board; the reproduction of a group of drawings drawn by Távora in the classroom to illustrate the theoretical issues dealt with in the course of *Teoria Geral da Organização do Espaço* in the last two years of teaching (1991-1992 and 1992-1993)²; the summary programme of the topics dealt with in this course; the reprint of the text *Arquitetura e Urbanismo, a Lição das constantes* written in 1952³.

The latter is a short essay of seminal importance, as it defines some cornerstones of the theoretical reflection that ten years later Távora will have the opportunity to elaborate more fully in the book *Da Organização do Espaço*⁴. The task that Távora considers necessary to lay the foundations of the teaching of architecture is, first of all, to widen its field of action to the organisation of space, extended to all spheres, in a multi-scalar and meta-historical vision. The focus is on the importance of architecture as a conditioning element of human life, on its active role within the perpetual transformation in which the different rhythms that characterise the history of civilisations alternate. The tension towards the search for the theoretical dimension is never oriented towards knowledge as an aim in itself, but towards the pursuit of the "appropriateness of the relationship between the work and life". In this article, the very young Portuguese architect takes the opportunity to openly define his way of understanding modernity: it is not a style in the academic sense, but an attitude aimed at finding integration between all the elements that contribute to the formation of a work. This is why architecture implicitly carries within itself a condition of "permanent modernity". Alexander Alves Costa will later describe the specificity of this interpretation through the effective definition of "inclusive modernity"⁵. In it, as well as in the affirmation of

1 Fernando Távora, *Teoria Geral da Organização do Espaço. Arquitetura e Urbanismo, a Lição das constantes* (Porto: FAUP Publicações, 1993).

2 During the lectures of the course *Teoria Geral da Organização do Espaço* Fernando Távora used to devote time to the elaboration of drawings, which have become famous, capable of synthesising the different themes addressed in a single large sheet of 'papel de cenário'. The sequence of drawings from his last years of teaching are reproduced in full scale in the "Aulas" section (at the FAUP), curated by Manuel Correia Fernandes, within the exhibition FERNANDO TÁVORA. PENSAMENTO LIVRE (Porto, October 2023 – February 2024) that Fundação Marques da Silva has dedicated to the master, in the year of his centenary, under the coordination of Alexander Alves Costa.

3 "Arquitetura e Urbanismo, a Lição das constantes" è un articolo originariamente pubblicato in *Lusitana. Revista illustrada de Cultura*, no 2 (1952).

4 There are several texts that anticipate issues developed in *Da Organização do Espaço*, writings that between 1947 and 1955 fix a series of theoretical nodes and in which Távora's interest in an authentic understanding of Portuguese architecture frequently emerges. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that in 1947 the *Cadernos de Arquitectura* series was inaugurated with the publication of an expanded version of his essay *O Problema da Casa Portuguesa* (first published in the weekly "Aléio" in 1945), in which he proposed a new look at the theme of tradition, emancipating it from the picturesque version that the regime had formalised. See Fernando Távora, "O Problema da Casa Portuguesa," *Cadernos de Arquitectura*, no 1 (1947).

5 "His work has never abandoned its stated fidelity, but has matured in it like its author. And unlike other ... he transformed fidelity into something inclusive and not exclusive. Hence its permanent contemporaneity". Alexander Alves Costa, "Fernando Távora. Pensamento Livre", in *Fernando Távora. Pensamento Livre*, Catálogo da Exposição, (Porto: Fundação Marques da Silva, 2023):13. Eng. Transl. Carlotta Torricelli.

the importance of knowledge of the past as a matter of design for the future, lies the most lasting lesson that Távora leaves to the School of Porto.

In the introductory note to the 1993 publication, albeit in the context of an institutional accompanying text, in a few icastic sentences Alves Costa gives evidence of the role that Távora, as a professor and as a man, played, profoundly marking the structure and cultural, critical and operational attitude of the school:

The School sees itself in Távora, we see ourselves in him and through him we have built the broad consensus that has allowed us to face the imbalances or new balances of contemporaneity. His fundamental lesson simply stems from his unique ability to distinguish the essential from the superfluous or circumstantial, and while we were divided by circumstance, with him we were united in reinforcing and taking into account the most perennial structural values, cemented by the permanent presence of a morality that never admitted any breach in the defence of human dignity. Such an abstraction could have paved the way for all kinds of perversity if it hadn't been, as in his case, actively vigilant in building the happiness of all men, respecting their differences, and looking up to and loving them in the day-to-day of a life so passionately lived. And it was in this apparent paradox of reference to the essence and attachment to the quality of the moment that Távora built his teaching as a natural result of his way of being in the world. [...]

But what profoundly marked the School throughout its more than forty years of teaching was the compatibility of this modernist conviction with the attempt to elaborate a method and not the transmission or defence of a formal code, it was the consideration of History as an operational instrument for the construction of the present, it was, not only the definition of Architecture in its constructive and functional adequacy, but above all as a representation of each one because it represents everyone, making each building a living body, an organism with its own soul and language.⁶

Finally, the fact that this publication selects precisely the programme of the *Teoria Geral da Organização do Espaço* course, together with the sketches, of great strength and extreme synthesis, that Távora elaborated during his now legendary lectures, significantly demonstrates the role that the text *Da Organização do Espaço* – which constitutes the theoretical basis of this teaching, as well as one of the compulsory readings – has covered and still covers today in the curriculum of the Architecture programme. The course, conceived by Távora and present since the 1980s, that is to say, from the origins of the institutional structuring of the School,⁷ is compulsory in the first year, and is highly recom-

⁶ Alexander Alves Costa, memorandum of 25 August 1993 accompanying the publication *Teoria Geral da Organização do Espaço. Arquitectura e Urbanismo, a Lição das constantes* (Porto: FAUP Publicações, 1993).

⁷ It should be noted here that the Architecture course, born within ESBAF, would only become autonomous from those of Painting and Sculpture only in 1967, and in 1979 it was integrated as university teaching under the name of FAUP (Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto). The crucial moments in the life of this institution, from the battles of 1969 to the redefinition of the teaching structure in the 1980s and its subsequent remodelling, are all marked by Távora's commitment and continuity with his thinking.

mended for those who, in any year, manage to access a period of study at the school from abroad. For the school it represents an unavoidable passage for those who wish to understand the roots of the pedagogical model that is transmitted from generation to generation in Porto and in those Portuguese Faculties of Architecture, founded subsequently, that openly declare continuity with the Tavorian line of thought.⁸

For these reasons, the study of the theoretical synthesis that Távora outlines in the pages of *Da Organização do Espaço* appears to be of relevance today, also favored by the dissemination of the text in various languages.⁹

The book was published in 1962, in a country oppressed by the *Estado Novo* (the dictatorship that lasted from 1933 to 1974, which followed the military coup in 1926) and was written as a contest exam for teaching at the *Escola Superior de Belas-Artes do Porto* (ESBAP). The context in which it is written, therefore, is necessarily specific, yet the author uses the academic circumstance to bring to synthesis a series of reflections on which he also focused during his experiences abroad.

On those occasions, in fact, he acquired a breadth of horizons, which, as a young lecturer, he finds it necessary to bring back to the school where he trained and where he teaches, precisely at a time when, due to the political situation, international exchanges are infrequent and not very easy. He is aware that the possibility of being included in the international architectural debate of those years represents a privileged condition for a Portuguese of that period and, at the same time, entails a responsibility that induces the search for change, practised from the depths of one's condition.

It is interesting to recall how obtaining the Entitlement as a Professor at ESBAP foresaw at the time the realisation of a project (*Prova de Grande Composição*) – the test assigned on that occasion was the realisation of a shopping centre between Praça Carlos Alberto and Rua do Carmo, where Távora proposes a radical response to the problems of the historical city – together with the elaboration of a dissertation of a theoretical nature. Over time, many of these dissertations have formed a mosaic of disciplinary insights, thanks to which it is possible to reconstruct the geography of reciprocal influences, links and cross-references between the Portuguese architectural culture of the time and the international debate. Mention should be made here, by way of example, of that of Octávio Lixa Filgueiras, presented in the same Távora session under

⁸ Fernando Távora is a member of the scientific commissions for the creation of degree courses in Architecture at the universities of Coimbra (since 1989) and Minho in Guimarães (since 1997).

⁹ The original Portuguese text from 1962 was republished by ESBAP (and subsequent reprints by FAUP Publicações) in 1982, accompanied by an introduction by Nuno Portas. There are currently two complete translations of the text, in Castilian and Italian, respectively: Fernando Távora, *Sobre la Organización del espacio*, eds. Aitor Varea Oro and Eva Raga i Domingo, (Valencia: Universitat Politècnica de València, 2014) (in addition to Portas' 1982 introduction, this edition is accompanied by an introductory essay by Jorge Figueira, *Sobre la organización del espacio. Como sobrevivir a la melancolía*); Fernando Távora, *Dell'organizzazione dello spazio*, ed. Carlotta Torricelli, (Milan: notttempo, 2021), in addition to Portas' 1982 introduction, this edition is accompanied by an introductory essay by Carlotta Torricelli, *L'incontro tra la vita e le forme in architettura. Attualità del pensiero di Távora*. Also available is the English translation of the first part of the book: Fernando Távora, "On space organisation", *Estudo Prévio* no. 20 (2022): 29-39. <https://doi.org/10.26619/2182-4339/20.5>. Published from: José Manuel Rodrigues, ed., *Teoria e crítica de arquitetura. Século XX*, (Lisbon: OA – SRS, Caleidoscópio, 2010): 480-488.

the title *A Função Social do Arquitecto* and that of the previous year by João Andresen, brother of the great poet Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen, *Para uma cidade mais humana*.

At the time of this book's writing, Távora has already realised a number of important architectural works that have found their way into both national and international contexts, albeit on the limited occasions allowed by a country oppressed by dictatorship.

As an invited member of the ODAM (*Organização dos Arquitectos Modernos*, founded in Porto in 1947), he was among the architects who took part in the CIAM (International Congresses of Modern Architecture), where he acted as a mediator between the internal debate and the various battles that were undermining the crystalline certainties of the Modern Movement and paving the way for new critical and operational orientations.

More specifically, Távora participated in the Hoddesdon Congress in 1951, the Aix-en-Provence Congress in 1953, the Dubrovnik Congress in 1956 and the Otterlo Congress in 1959 – in the latter of which he also had the opportunity to individually present his recent works, such as the House in Ofir (1957-1958) and the Market in Vila da Feira (1953-1959). To the latter, Aldo Van Eyck would refer to demonstrate how the notion of “space and time” had lost its effectiveness and could be replaced by the more vital notion of “place and occasion”.¹⁰

I arrived at the conclusion that whatever space and time mean, *place and occasion mean more, for space in the image of man is place and time in the image of man is occasion* [...] time and space remain frozen abstractions [...] Place and occasion constitute each other's realization in human terms [...] Since furthermore place and occasion imply participation in what exists, lack of place – and thus of occasion – will cause loss of identity, isolation and frustration.¹¹

For the young Portuguese architect, the recognition by the members of Team X of a different mode of relationship between architecture and place in his built work, tangible in particular in the conception of the central space of the Vila da Feira market¹², represents an important acknowledgement. Yet, as will be seen later, Távora's thought goes beyond the theme of participation to appeal to a deeper involvement of men in the processes of transformation, always understood as collective acts founded on a shared ethic, capable of calibrating the relationship between nature and culture. The action to which Távora calls us is not that of participation, but that of collaboration. Collaboration of all men for the realisation of a common dream.

¹⁰ Aldo Van Eyck expressly refers here to the notion of “space and time” as understood by Sigfried Giedion in *Space, Time and Architecture* (Cambridge – MA, Harvard University Press: 1941).

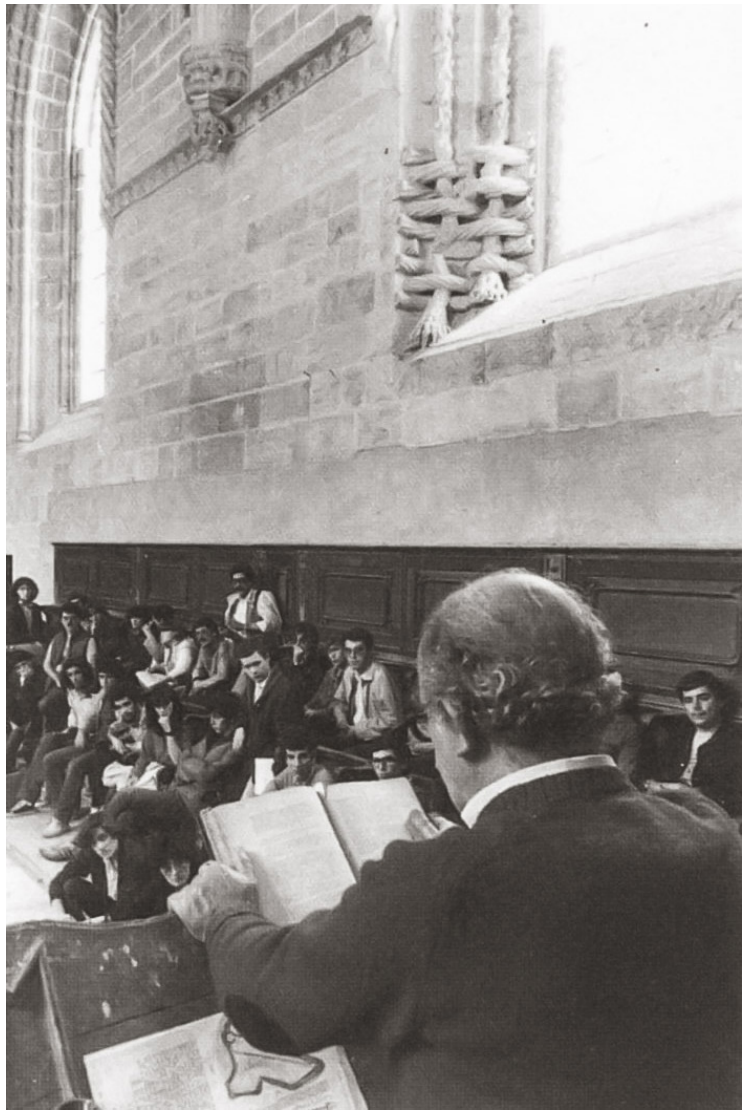
¹¹ Aldo van Eyck, “The medicine of reciprocity tentatively illustrated”, in Id. *Writings: Collected Articles and Other Writings 1947-1998*, ed. V. Ligtelijn and F. Strauven (Amsterdam: SUN Publishers, 2008), 312-323.

¹² Photographs of the completed work appear on two pages of the book collecting the outcomes of the congress: Oscar Newman, Jürgen Joedicke, eds. *CIAM '59 in Otterlo: Dokumente Der Modernen Architektur 1* (Stuttgart: Karl Krämer Verlag, 1961), 133-137.

Among the other works realised in the span of time between obtaining the diploma of architect in 1950 (achieved by presenting the CODA¹³ *Casa sobre o mar*) and obtaining the teaching qualification in 1962, it is worth mentioning the project experience of the Quinta da Conceição Municipal Park in Leça de Palmeira (Matosinhos), with the construction of the Tennis Pavilion within it, and the construction of the Quinta do Cedro Primary School in Vila Nova de Gaia, which will also find international diffusion.

The peripheral condition from which he observes the architectural debate allows Távora to cross-fertilise the teachings of the various masters of the Modern Movement and, at the same time, the critical attitude of those figures who, in the post-war period, questioned functionalist dogmatism, reconnecting the threads of the memory of places; where memory means that form of dynamic knowledge, thanks to which the coherence of the constructive act is substantiated not in a self-referential way, but through the relationship with the circumstantial elements.

The social instances of which architecture is a vector in no way lead the author to deviate from the work within the discipline, on the contrary, they push him to explore its limits, in search of a quality that is perceived as a shared value. From the very first works, the tension between the particular and the universal is configured as the theme around which the reasons for the architectural project revolve. In the project description of the House in Ofir, the author uses the metaphor, later to become famous, of understanding architecture as a compound and not as a mixture. In chemistry, in fact, the compound derives from the relationship of different factors that, by virtue of their new condition of relationship, change their state. There is, therefore, not a simple juxtaposition of elements, nor is it left to one element to predominate over the others, but a reciprocal modification: "as to the principle adopted, we have no doubt whatsoever that this is the only one to follow should we want our work, due to their individuality, to be recognized universally".¹⁴



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Fig. 1

Fernando Távora on a study trip with ESBAAP (Porto) students, Tomar Convent, 1982, photo by Joaquim Vieira (FIMS/AFT).

¹³ C.O.D.A. is the acronym for Concurso para Obtenção do Diploma de Arquitecto (Competition to Obtain the Diploma of Architect).

¹⁴ Fernando Távora, "Casa de férias, Ofir, 1957-58", in *Fernando Távora*, ed. Luiz Trigueiros (Lisbon: Editorial Blau, 1993), 78.

Da Organização do Espaço is a text that deals with the theme of the formal organisation of space as a starting point for an investigation aimed at bringing the architectural project – understood as an act of transformation that applies to all scales: from the object to the city, to the landscape – back into the sphere of culture considered in a broad sense, according to a profoundly humanistic vision. Not only architects, but all people, as citizens, are called upon to collaborate in the definition of the space they inhabit and, at the same time, are responsible for its enrichment or impoverishment. Each individual must become aware of the repercussions that the organisation of space has in the various spheres of our existence. In this sense, affirming the unity of the architectural fact implies supporting the integration of architecture, culture and civic engagement. It must be acknowledged that, from the outset, the treatment is linked to the tradition of architectural treatises, of which Távora is a profound connoisseur and of which he will become a passionate collector. This places his work in the groove of the great classical tradition, to which the Portuguese master feels he belongs, recognising in it the matrix of a profoundly logical thought, but equally dynamic and capable of reconfirming its principles in relation to the problems that contemporary life poses from time to time.¹⁵

The tension towards the individuation of original forms and the recognition of “constants” are the basis for the development of that project research that does not tend towards crystallisation, but towards the ability to accept the vitality implicit in the act of organising space.

These are the premises for which Távora states in the introductory note:

The interest that the work may have lies, we believe, in the system of relationships that we seek to establish, in the certainty that the problems of the organisation of space are of a much wider scope than is generally attributed to them, and that we have to overcome the limited concepts or preconceived ideas with which such problems are usually focused.

We hope that this essay will make each reader more aware of the role they themselves play in the organisation of space, as well as the importance that creating more harmonious forms can play in their life, both as an individual and as part of a society.

The book is divided into four parts that proceed from a more general, outward-looking view to an examination of the Portuguese reality, in an attempt to place it within the international scenario. In each of them the different experiences that the young architect has conducted and carried out up to that point, on different fronts, from the profession to research, from study trips to teaching, come together.

In the first part *Dimensions, relations and characteristics of organised space*, the author deals in a general way with the theme of interpreting space as a

¹⁵ See: Salvatore Settis, *Futuro del "classico"* (Torino: Einaudi, 2004).

continuum, in which solids and voids, positive and negative should contribute equally to the creation of a balanced whole.

In this perspective, Távora binds himself to the instances of pure modernism, understood as the search for order through an uninterrupted process that from conception leads to execution, bringing together the contributions of different sectors; this approach is entirely oriented towards the operational feedback that determines the mission of the project in the transformations that condition human life. This operativity translates into reflection on the generation of form and thus on space, which, from the pragmatic and formalistic dimension in which it had been confined, recovers the qualities of a positive and significant element:

We can also generalize, stating that what we call space is also a shape, negative or mold of shapes that our eyes seize [...] Visually, therefore, we may consider that shapes animate space, but it should never be forgotten that, in a more real concept, the same space is also a shape because what we call space is made up of matter and not only shapes that exist in it and occupy it, as our eyes let us assume. This notion, so often forgotten, that space that divides – but also connects – shapes, is also a shape itself, is fundamental, because it allows us to gain full awareness that there are no isolated shapes and that a relationship always exists, both between those that occupy a certain space, and between them and one that, although we do not see it, we know that it is shaped as well – negative or mold – of apparent shapes.¹⁶

On an epistemological level, the fundamental shift that Távora makes is from the domination of space to the control of space, from its occupation to its organization; from this perspective, it is not possible to separate art and technique, it is not possible to distinguish between actions driven purely by functional needs and others sustained by an artistic intention, nor is it possible to separate major and minor arts.

The expression “organizing space” on a human scale, has, for us, a different meaning from that which could have, for example, the expression “filling up space”. We sense in the word “organizing” a desire, a manifestation of will, a logic, that the word “occupy” does not comprehend and hence we use the expression “organization of space”, for it reveals man as an intelligent being and artist by nature. From that, it results that space occupied by man always tends to – always walks in the sense of – its purpose, which is the creation of harmony in space, considering that harmony is what accurately translates balance, challenging consciousness, and sensitivity, as well as hierarchical and correct integration of factors. [...]

¹⁶ This quote and all the next ones from the first part of the book are taken from the English translation of this part of the book published in: Fernando Távora, “On space organization”, *Estudo Prévio*, no. 20 (2022): 29-39. Quotations from other parts of the book have been elaborated for the present publication

From what has been said, it seems that a fundamental characteristic of organized space can be deduced: its continuity. Space is continuous, cannot be organized with a partial view, does not accept limitations in its organization. And in the same way that continuity forms space, both are so closely linked that one is negative from the other, and vice versa, so they cannot separate; the visually seized shapes, thus, maintain close relationships – harmonic and inharmonic – but evident in any case.

This insistence on the continuity of space brings out the importance of considering not only the facts themselves, but above all the relationships between them:

[...] applying to the concept of space, that there is left is as important as the one that is filled [...] Everything is important in space organization – shapes themselves, the relationship between them, the space that limits them. And this truth that results from space being continuous has been largely forgotten.

The consequence of this vision based on a sense of reciprocity is the idea that every project must be born from the tension between the plan of what is to be conceived anew and that set of factors in which it is located and from which it cannot prescind, which the author gives the name of “circumstance”.

The affirmation of the continuity of space, finally, implies the conception of time as a continuous becoming, in which the dynamics of transformation is recorded as a positive datum, as a latent opportunity in things in themselves, a tension towards the continuous generation of new forms, in an ever-renewed dialectic between permanence and change, between the past “to be observed” and the future “to be built”.

Nonetheless, because space is continuous and time is one of its dimensions, it is also irreversible; that is, given the constant march of time and all that it entails and means, an organized space can never be what it once was, hence the fact that space is in permanent coming.

On the one hand, therefore, the idea of the inexorability of transformation processes, together with the interpretation of phenomena not as isolated facts but always in terms of relationships, confirm the affinity of Távora’s thought with that of the classical tradition. It is impossible not to quote here Leonardo da Vinci’s words that Ernesto Nathan Rogers used to cite as an introduction to his *History of Modern Architecture* course at the Milan Polytechnic:

Leonardo da Vinci, always a good example of one who stated his concepts both highly poetically and rationally, expressed with these words the real meaning of the passing of time: “the water that laps against one’s hand in a river is the last to have gone and the first to have come – such is the nature of the present”.¹⁷

¹⁷ Ernesto Nathan Rogers, *Il senso della storia* (Milano: Edizioni Unicopli, 2003), 62.

But at the same time, this approach places Távora's treatment on the frontier of the scientific advances that characterised the Post-War period and which, as Carlo Rovelli reminds us, still pose fundamental enigmas in the interpretation of reality:

a century has passed, and we are at the same point. The equations of quantum mechanics and their consequences are used daily by physicists, engineers, physicists and biologists, in the most diverse fields [...] yet they remain mysterious: they do not describe what happens to a physical system, but only how a physical system is perceived by another physical system. What does this mean? Does it mean that the existential reality of a system is undescrivable? [...] Or does it mean, as it seems to me, that we must accept the idea that reality is only interaction?.¹⁸

From these two characteristics of space – continuity and irreversibility – derives, on the one hand, the idea that the organisation of space is a collective work, the result of collaboration between all men – understood both in a “horizontal” sense, between contemporaries, and in a “vertical” sense, between men of different epochs animated by a common feeling – and, on the other hand, the great responsibility that architects have, since, by trade, they have a greater involvement in the management of the problem. Indeed, they must be aware that the space they are going to organise is conditioned by circumstance, but in turn will be conditioned by future transformations. This is why the act of organising space carries within itself an important pedagogical role.

The search for consonance between forms and circumstance must be practised through knowledge of the contemporary context, of different geographical realities and of the past, without any form of erudition, let alone intellectualism, but always with the aim of recognising the relationship between forms and life.¹⁹ It is Edoardo Souto de Moura who eloquently defines the tension between time and place, which underlies Távora's passion for study trips: ‘Távora has something telluric about him, like Pascoaes in *A arte de Ser Português* [...] Távora seemed to be interested in History, yet what Távora loved was not History, but the instant, the territory, the geography laden with history’.²⁰ The definition of telluric, applied to Távora, brings to mind the words with which Henri Focillon describes history, as a geology, of layers and fractures, which allow different times to coexist in the same place:

History is not like a river on whose waters the events, and fragments of events, are carried along at the same pace and in the same direction. In

18 Carlo Rovelli, *Sette brevi lezioni di fisica* (Milano: Adelphi Edizioni, 2014), 29 (Translation by the author).

19 The desire to investigate the connection that is established, through experience, between forms and life, refers back to the thought of Ernesto Nathan Rogers, who is not expressly cited in this book by the author, but with respect to whom there are numerous affinities. In this regard, it is worth recalling the influence of the Italian debate on the training of Portuguese architects in those years. Bruno Zevi's publications are widespread in Portugal, and are among the fundamental study texts, as are the writings of Ernesto Nathan Rogers, whom Távora had the opportunity to meet in person as early as 1952 in Venice, participating in the first CIAM summer school at Iuav. The numerous affinities between Rogers' thought and Távora's would deserve to be explored in depth with independent discussion. For some further reflections see: Carlotta Torricelli, “L'incontro tra la vita e le forme in architettura. Attualità del pensiero di Távora”, in Fernando Távora, *Dell'organizzazione dello spazio* (Milano: nottetempo, 2021).

20 Eduardo Souto de Moura, “Fernando Távora. Ritratto dell'artista da giovane”, *Casabella*, no 744 (2006), 77.

fact, what we call history consists precisely in the diversity and unevenness of its currents. It should remind us rather of geological strata, laid one on the top of the other, at various angles, broken here and there by sudden faults; here we can grasp in one place and at one time several of the earth's ages; and every moment of the time that has gone by is here at once past, present, and to come.²¹

In support of the importance of the collaboration of all men in the construction of space, Távora makes his own José Ortega y Gasset's accusation against the "barbarism of specialisation", considered as one of the phenomena, characterising his contemporaneity, that must be stemmed with determination. The influence of *La rebelión de las masas*²² in the Portuguese master's thinking is very strong and he will see its prophetic relevance in the face of various and successive educational reforms, changes in the profession and, more generally, social transformations.

The second part entitled *Contemporary Man and the Organisation of his Space* begins with considerations on the parabola of the development of Western thought, with respect to which Távora more than once emphasises the fundamental backbone role of the Greece-Rome-Europe line. In this section of the essay, the influence of the study of some thinkers, such as the aforementioned Ortega y Gasset, and Oswald Spengler, emerges clearly.²³ Their reflections underpin the pessimism that the Portuguese author declares towards a civilisation focused exclusively on "progress" as its sole objective. The risk he recognises in such an attitude is that of erasing every ripple, concentrating only on the acceleration of the speed of production and nullifying the possibility of recognising, in the products of the human intellect, the inner language, that is, that profound intention that ensures that the individuals of a civilisation pursue a common destiny.

This part also constitutes an important testimony of the experience of the great journey of 1960, which represents a crucial formative moment for the author and will constantly re-emerge in his lectures, essays and even in the definition of his many subsequent trips. Thanks to a scholarship from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, Távora had the opportunity to visit the United States and Japan. It was a rare experience of study and research that took him around the world in four months: after the United States (from which he allowed himself a brief diversion to visit Mexico) and Japan (where he took part in the World Design Conference – WoDeCo in Tokyo), he went on to Thailand, Pakistan, Lebanon, Egypt and concluded his itinerary, not surprisingly, in Greece.

21 Henri Focillon, *The Year 1000* (New York, F. Ungar Pub. Co 1970): 1.

22 José Ortega y Gasset, *La rebelión de las masas* (Madrid: Espasa, 1943). English Translation: *The Revolt of the Masses* (London and New York: W.W. Norton, 1993).

23 Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (Wien: 1918/München 1922). Eng. Trans. *The Decline of the West*, translated by Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1928). For the influence of Ortega y Gasset and Spengler in Távora's thinking see: Bernardo Pinto de Almeida, "A Arquitectura É O Dia-a-Dia: Entrevista a Fernando Távora," *Boletim Da Universidade Do Porto*, 1993; Manuel Mendes, "Para Quê Exigir À Sombra a Rectidão Que Não Possue a Vara Que a Produz?," in Leonardo Express, edited by Rita Marnoto (Coimbra: FBA, Ferrand, Bicker & Associados, 2004), 111-138; and Fernando Távora and Jorge Figueira, "Fernando Távora, Coisa Mental: Entrevista," *Unidade* (June 1992).

The official objective of the mission for which he receives funding is to investigate the working methods of public bodies and the educational programmes of universities in major North American cities, focusing in particular on the role of urban and regional planning. But in the context of a country oppressed by dictatorship, the young architect – here as a Portuguese lecturer sent for refresher courses – is aware of how this opportunity places him in a privileged position and, at the same time, entails a responsibility that induces the search for change, always practised within the profound awareness of his own condition.

As his *Diary*²⁴ reveals, but also as emerges from reading this essay, Távora, in this kaleidoscope of encounters with major institutions (in addition to academic ones, one of the most relevant events is his visit to Taliesin East, exactly one year after the death of Frank Lloyd Wright) and with important personalities in the international architectural context (he had the opportunity to meet Louis Kahn, Josep Lluís Sert, Paul Rudolph, Kevin Lynch and Vincent Scully; among others, he got to know the work of Mies Van der Rohe, Walter Gropius and Eero Saarinen by visiting their architecture), he aims to observe new metropolises, cultural institutions, and models of living, but at the same time engages in a profound reinterpretation of his own cultural matrices. It is interesting to note that in this part of the book, the two architects that the young Portuguese cites as evidence of the possibility of tracing alternative paths to pure functionalism are Wright – with respect to whom, however, he immediately warns against the risks of mythologising his positions – and Alvar Aalto, whose work not only stands out for its quality, but also for the coherence between architectural expression and the social structure of the country it is brought to represent.²⁵

Always attentive to recording the tension between local cultures and the diffusion of a universal culture, derived from advances and technical progress, which “seems to better satisfy people’s need”, the author wonders how to relate to these “real situations of clash that will certainly be eliminated, diluted little by little thanks to a synthesis between the traditional and the new conditions of life”.

In the course of this part of the reflection, centred on the critique of the parable of Western man’s progress that has led to uncontrolled development from the Renaissance to the present day, the conviction gradually emerges that an important moment of self-criticism has arrived for modern man, which will lead to the elaboration of a renewed outlook, capable of perceiving the squandering of space as the main problem to be curbed for the development of contemporary society.

24 Fernando Távora, *Diário de “bordo”*, edited by Rita Marnoto (Matosinhos: Associação Casa da Arquitectura 2012), English version. The Italian reader can find the full Italian translation in: Fernando Távora, *Diario di bordo*, eds. Antonio Esposito, Giovanni Leoni, Raffaella Maddaluno, (Siracusa: LetteraVentidue, 2022). In addition to the important essays in the Italian edition, the role that the voyage played in the construction of this Portuguese architect’s thought has been discussed by various scholars. Mention should be made, among others, of Jorge Figueira, ‘Fernando Távora. Alma Mater. Viagem na América. 1960’, in *Fernando Távora. Modernidade Permanente*, ed. José Antonio Bandeirinha (Guimarães: Associação Casa da Arquitectura, 2012) 38-53

25 It is recalled here that Távora would later visit Finland in 1968, accompanied by other Portuguese architects, including Álvaro Siza.

As a result and fatal consequence of this need, a revision and restructuring of the entire system of relationships and values now takes place; man is now thinking about himself, about the meaning of his evolution, about the possibilities of his future.

Here, the core of reflection is the problem of urban development and its possibility of being defined and controlled, so that it takes shape through design and not through natural proliferation. Also on the role of urbanism and planning and the importance of activating a collaboration between the abstract idea of design and the concrete reality of circumstance, the author questions and proposes different models from what he has been able to record in the structure of land government in the United States. In general, he hopes that for countries and regions throughout the world, territorial development plans and financial development plans will be defined in such a way as to pursue economic progress while at the same time safeguarding space, understood as heritage, thus demonstrating the potential for criticism of the dominant system implicit in the writing.

In fact, the experience of the Gulbenkian trip has allowed the author to see and compare different metropolitan realities, contributing to forming in him the idea that the contemporary city represents a new type of organised space, to be considered, in terms of size and configuration, like a monster, which in the end makes man, its maker, a victim:

The most visible manifestation, due to its size, of the discontinuity and disorder of contemporary space, is the city, and although man as an urban being has a long history, the truth is that the typical city of today presents completely new aspects and problems. [...] The contemporary city thus attains a dominating form, a visual scale whose dominance man cannot control, and it dominates and absorbs in its growth all the space that surrounds it, both the horizontal space where it rests and the vertical space that the possibilities of technology allow it to occupy. And in its uncontrolled growth, it destroys everything, from the natural landscape to the very man who creates it.

Herein lies one of the most interesting passages of this reflection, which paves the way for the construction of an alternative paradigm to that of simple alignment with mass industrial civilisation – of which he sees all the limits of the individualism inherent in the petty-bourgeois model – and the race to reach North American standards. The author recognises in Europe – and in particular in Portugal, in its isolated and marginal condition of the time – a degree of diversity not to be understood exclusively as “backwardness”, but rather as a possibility for the definition of alternative scenarios, arising from the knowledge of what happened in the more developed countries and also from the awareness of the limits highlighted. In support of the need to seek coherence between industry and craftsmanship, Távora brings up Walter Gropius’s thesis regarding industrial design, writing:

In truth, “industrial design” is beginning to emerge [...] the contrast between the extreme anonymity of the industrial product (anonymity that has nothing to do with a low level of quality) and the extreme individuality of the handmade product, a contrast of extremes linked together by an infinite number of possible positions, is gaining interest day by day.

Once again, an opportunity for change opens up, one with a positive side, capable of challenging the canons of industrial civilisation. Referring to the thought of Jean Fourastié, in fact, Távora hopes that technical progress can emancipate man from menial work, leading him towards spiritual work.²⁶

Thus, in the act of updating the experiences conducted in the rest of the world and taking into account the most advanced tendencies, Távora seizes the opportunity to question the stereotypes of the reductionism and simplification of identity implemented by the Salazarist regime, reconnecting the plots of assimilation and mirroring, of migrations and echoes, that have characterised Portuguese cultural history. For his temperament, more interested in archaic testimonies than in expressions of brazen modernity, the encounter with the American world of the time is destabilising: on the one hand, Távora appreciates its character as a permanent laboratory, its effectiveness and persuasiveness, but on the other he sees the limits of that society founded on the mechanisation of processes and the homogenisation of expressions.

It is from these assumptions that the idea of research based on consonance between human progress and nature takes shape, which does not erase differences, but draws richness and grounding from them.²⁷

The third part of the book concerns *The Organisation of Contemporary Portuguese Space*. The chapter begins with an examination of national history, immediately declaring an operational approach and emphasising that the past is not a heritage to be frozen in its fixity, but should always be read in relation to the present, with attention paid to what is happening in other countries:

[...] we have always insisted on the danger of a unilateral view when it comes to spatial phenomena and we would not fall into such an error here. [...] We should also remember that when we criticise our present, we do so on the basis of spaces from our own happier past or spaces other than our own whose present is also happier, in any case from a perspective that may even be wrong, because our past is certainly not coming back and our present circumstances are very different from those of other countries.

26 Jean Fourastié, *La civilisation de 1960* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1947).

27 For an in-depth discussion of Portuguese interpretation around the possibility of combining local culture, social ethics and coherence between form and function, see: Rui Aristides Bixirão Neto Marinho Lebre, *From the organization of space to the organization of society. A study of the political commitments in post-war Portuguese architecture, 1945-69*, Ph.D thesis in Architecture with the guidance of Prof. José António Oliveira Bandeirinha and Dr. Nuno Manuel de Azevedo Andrade Porto (Coimbra: Department of Architecture of the Faculty of Sciences and Technology University of Coimbra, October 2016).

The analysis of the aspects and problems of contemporary Portuguese space starts from the observation of the existence of the two great urban spaces that act as poles of attraction, namely Lisbon and Oporto, and from a critique of the planning model that has separated the problems of these two cities from the general vision capable of encompassing the rest of the country:

In truth, the problem of Lisbon and its region cannot be disconnected from the general problem of the country because, as complementary issues, they are inseparable [...] Otherwise, how can we create harmony in the national space? If space is continuous – how can we solve the problem of its organisation without looking at it in its entirety? Only on the basis of a national plan can the problem of our continental space really be solved [...] This is why the pressing need for some regional plans emphasises the urgent need for a national plan. [...] This is precisely one of the reasons why the physical planning of the territory has followed, not only among us, but in general in all countries, an evolution contrary to that which would be most logical, moving from the particular to the general, and not in the opposite direction.

Next, the author questions not only how a national spatial government plan should be structured, but how urban planning regulations can strike the right balance between prefiguration and adherence to circumstances:

Day by day, the urban planning discipline loses the static and formalistic character that normally manifests itself in the “plan”, and is orientated in a more dynamic direction in which the forms come to enjoy a life that they didn’t have before, not least because most of the time they were already born dead.

Here again, Távora insists on the inseparability of architecture and urbanism and the importance of considering the whole relationship between a work and its environment as more important than the construction of each building in itself:

[...] because the inseparability of the phenomena of space organisation at various scales does not allow us to accept the hypothesis of good architecture in bad urbanism, or, more clearly, a high architectural level presupposes a high urbanistic level.

And in reasoning on the risks of neglecting the system of relationships between architecture and the circumstance that encompasses it, he takes the opportunity to call for a courageous change in the vision of the problems that afflict the Portuguese reality, emancipating the architectural question from the influence of “tastes” – personal, institutional and social strata –, in defence of the coherence between architecture and place.

[...] the relationship between a building and its site is of key importance and although normally, and from the point of view of size, the site pre-

dominates over the building, the truth is that the latter, although small, can totally destroy the former, when one would like to see a harmonious balance between the two elements present.

Here, in particular, Távora gives space to the reflections linked to the concrete experience of the *Inquérito*²⁸, bringing them directly into the practice of the discipline. There are two fundamental themes: the coherence between construction techniques, materials and place, between construction logic and spatial conception of the building; the importance of understanding the physical and anthropological characteristics of the territory, aimed at strengthening the link between the scale of human habitation and the broad scale of the landscape.

But because developments in our country have been slow and far from covering huge parts of the country where traditional techniques are still fully justified, the problem of choosing the optimum technical solution for each case is a delicate one, and it is necessary to find solutions that correspond to the many realities that the country still has, without falling into the primarism of studio or fashion solutions which, even if they can be realised, can lead to enormous economic waste, in addition to other inconveniences [...].

Then, as for another aspect of the forms of our architecture, we believe that it is almost fundamentally based on a criterion of "taste" [...]. But taste, perhaps because it is more subjective and therefore less easily debatable and has consequences that affect the appearance of forms (which for many is everything), is a factor that takes hold and gains dominance whenever, due to an apparent lack of constraints, the work of architecture seems to float in a void, thus becoming an easy prey to subjective notions and reassuring concretisation. And when taste predominates, everything submits to it and there are no reasons, even objective ones, even logical ones, even intelligent ones, that can overcome its common lack of reason.

Following this, the author tackles the theme of the relationship between old and new in architecture, a theme that he will put to the test through a series of relevant project experimentation, giving operational translation to his theoretical reflection. Once again, the vitality of Távora's design thought emerges, overturning the problem of time over the reality of space and unhinging the question of continuity with history, understood in philological terms, through the search for coherence with the place, as depository of memory. This attitude is fully in line with the line of investigation that will find full expression in George Kubler's research:

²⁸ The *Inquérito à Arquitectura Popular em Portugal* is a field research work that takes place between 1956 and 1958; the country is divided into six areas, in which as many research teams – architects, anthropologists, geographers – work in order to detect the authentic characteristics of the national reality and the links that exist between the conformation of the territory, settlement systems, building techniques and ways of life. Fernando Távora works in the team in charge of the Minho region. The results of the investigations are collected and published in: *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal* (Lisboa: Sindicato Nacional Dos Arquitectos, 1961).

Without change there is no history; without regularity there is no time. Time and history are related as rule and variation: time is the regular setting for the vagaries of history [...] No act ever is completely novel, and no act can ever be quite accomplished without variation".²⁹

His understanding of the project as a form of synthesis capable of capturing the incandescent core where the reason for things resides, in order to intervene in the existing heritage, projecting it into the future, is expressed in these words:

Another point, among many, also concerns us: the realisation of new works next to valuable works built by the past or in environments built by the past, as well as the alterations to old structures due to the effects of a fatal evolution of the times.

Two important aspects should be mentioned here: firstly, that the concept of "monument" in force among us will have to be extensively revised in order to go beyond this or that more or less erudite building, with a more or less well-known history, to encompass broader environments and humbler buildings; secondly, to point out that the work of the past constitutes a cultural value of space, and because this is irreversible, it cannot become what it once was or even continue to be what it was [...]. In truth, the values of the past must be stubbornly defended at all costs, but they must be defended with a constructive attitude, either by recognising the need for them and allowing them to be updated, or by accompanying them with contemporary works.

Távora then returns to the possibility of making economic and territorial development coherent, this time referring to the specific Portuguese context. In fact, the author points out how: the settlement of new industrial complexes was implemented without any kind of structural forecasting; reflection on the housing issue was not carried out in a radical manner, but only by chasing after housing emergencies from time to time – here we read in the watermark the formation of a thought that will be put to the test later in the SAAL experience³⁰; finally, not only school structures but the whole concept of the education system needs substantial revision.

But because the phenomenon of our economic backwardness has been pointed out many times, we don't insist on mentioning it, nor on

²⁹ George Kubler, *The Shape of Time. Remarks on the history of things* (New Haven CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1962).

³⁰ Following the *Revolução dos cravos* of 25 April 1974, thanks to the willingness of a group of architects and students to engage in the struggle for the right to housing, in a logic of democratisation of public space, the SAAL (*Serviço Ambulatório de Apoio Local*) Brigades were founded. The backwardness of the population and the dramatic situation of the housing of the working class are the causes of the action, while the experimental process is the direct involvement of the inhabitants in the realisations. An ambitious process that of the SAAL operation - defined by Távora in 1975 as "the only dream an architect, when he is awake, can dream" – which in little more than two years produced one hundred and seventy housing projects in different cities, made possible by the figure of Nuno Portas, architect and Secretary of State in the post-revolutionary government. The SAAL programme, whose parabola would be halted in 1976, materialises collective reflections on the relationship between the housing problem and the construction of the city. In Porto, in particular, there are numerous models of synthesis between typological innovation and continuity with the urban structure, in which we find many of the professors of what would become, a few years later, the Faculty of Architecture involved.

its obvious impact on the national space; however, it seems to us that it would be appropriate to try to say something about the importance of the relationship between physical planning and economic planning, given its topicality in our country [...]. In Portugal today, it (housing ndr) is one of the most difficult and urgent undertakings to which we will have to devote ourselves, but its solution will have to be approached with a broad vision, both in terms of the ends to be achieved and the means to be used.

It goes without saying, by implication, that a country where the housing problem is serious cannot have a harmoniously structured space and that, on the other hand, given the abundance of poor-quality housing, the existing housing, as well as being a determining and negative aspect of our circumstances, represents a serious phenomenon of spatial and economic squandering [...].

The dilettantish amateurism with which we all design and build in Portugal today cannot be reconciled with the harsh reality that surrounds us and, without falling into myths or utopias, we will have to review our entire position in this matter and try to find our own solutions to our own various difficulties, which, moreover, cannot only be the result of the goodwill of certain sectors but of total collaboration between all of us.

Concluding this part, Távora focuses on the problem of training suitable professionals to solve issues related to the changing urban phenomenon, territorial development, and the housing crisis, through an organic revision of the education system, in which the different sectors of education can participate in a single vision, as branches of the same tree: "How can we expect the work of these professionals, who ignore each other throughout their courses, to be harmonious in their relationships and in their work?"

The reflection closes by focusing on the link between teaching and research, where for the author project research is always understood as an eminently operational activity rooted in reality, defining what are still today the criteria on which the school and its educational offerings are based:

But in addition to teaching, which is its complement and just as indispensable, we have research, the weapon that best allows us to detect the intensity and quality of those problems that, as worrying as they are, should deserve greater attention [...] and this (research ndr) can range from studying the space needs of the various sectors of the population for the various buildings that serve them, to determining the "invariants" [term used by Fernando Chueca Goitia, *Invariantes castizos de la arquitectura española*. (Madrid: Dossat bolsillo, 1947) as an alternative to 'constants', a more common but less exact term] of the way the Portuguese live and work [...] and this (research ndr) can range from studying the space requirements that the various sectors of the population have for the various buildings that serve them, to determining the "invariants"

of the way the Portuguese have organised their space over time, passing through everything related to construction techniques and materials, etc. etc. Only by relying on research can teaching be carried out on a real basis and only research can guarantee an indispensable sense of collaboration insofar as it makes teaching aware of the problems of those for whom it is intended; this, we believe, is why, especially at university level, research and teaching are now inseparable activities.

The chapter ends again with a turnaround: Portugal's condition of backwardness is to be understood as a valid possibility, as a laboratory for experimenting with a form of collaboration between professionals and citizens that together build a new condition, in which harmony in the organisation of space and the happiness of its inhabitants live from a renewed relationship of reciprocity. Knowledge of history, in the context of a country oppressed by dictatorship and backwardness, is a means of emancipation from ignorance, far from a quest for legitimacy. Twelve years separate the writing of this essay from the Carnation Revolution; Távora's thinking here is positively positioned towards the future and at the same time rooted in tradition.

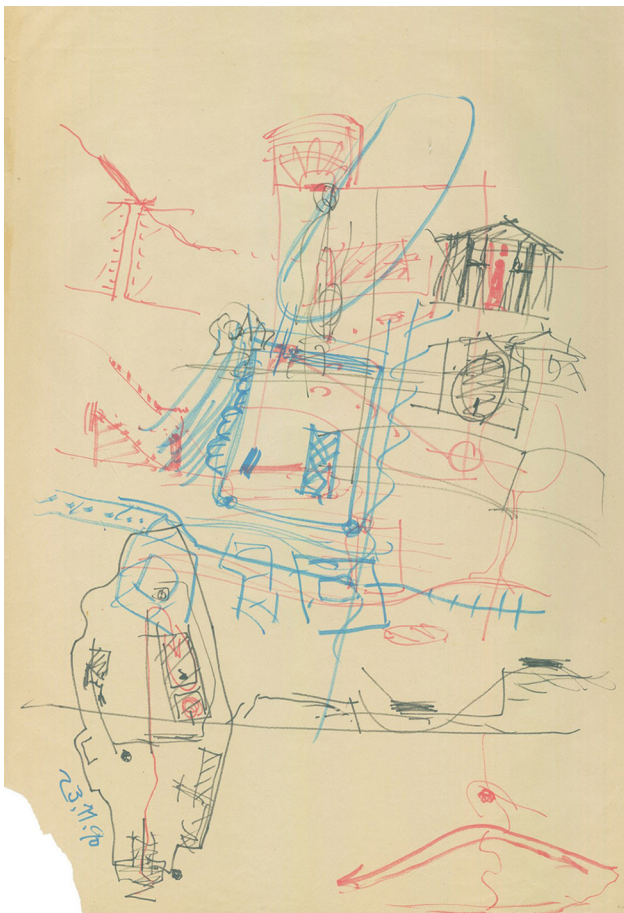
In the fourth and final part, *Around the Role of the Architect*, Távora returns to the theme of the tension between the work of the individual architect and the community to which he, as a professional "creator of forms, organiser of space par excellence", is called upon to give voice, clearly framing his civil role and excluding all forms of individualism and mythologising talents. He also returns to the theme of the diversity of the spheres to which architecture applies, while maintaining a single approach, a unitary vision; finally, he reiterates the role that the study of history and place have within the project, which must translate knowledge into living matter on which to base the construction of the new.

His fields of activity are multiple – because organised space has many facets. He designs and realises buildings, works on land planning at various scales and designs furniture.

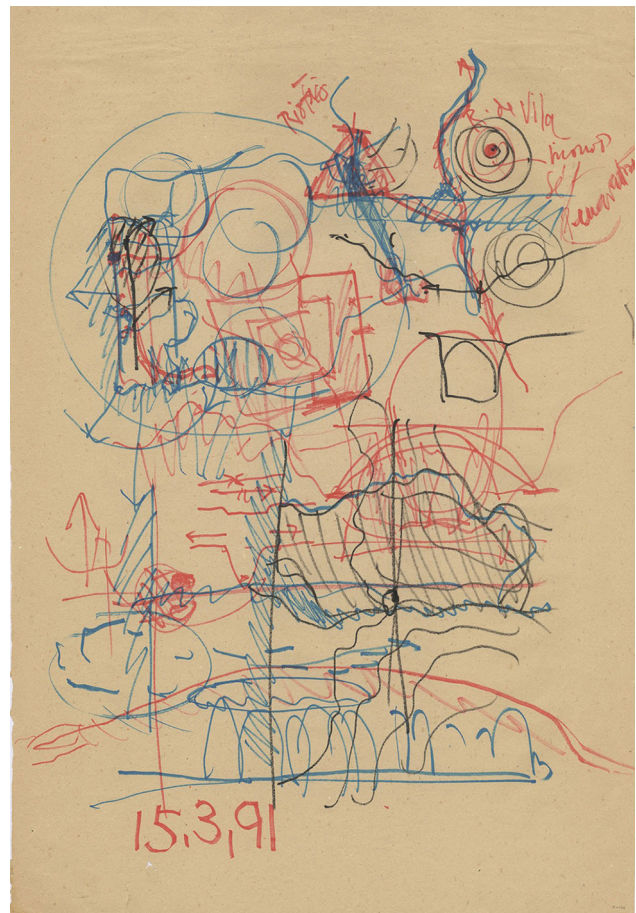
For him, however, designing, planning and drawing should only mean finding the right form, the correct form, the form that efficiently and beautifully realises the synthesis between what is necessary and what is possible, bearing in mind that this form will have a life, it will constitute a circumstance.

This being the case, designing, planning and drawing should not translate for the architect into the creation of meaningless forms, imposed by the caprices of fashion or any other kind of whim. Rather, the forms he creates must be the result of a wise balance between his personal vision and the circumstances that evolve around him, and for this he must know them intensely, so intensely that knowing and being are intertwined.

And he must counteract the negative aspects of the circumstance and value the positive aspects, which means, after all, educating and



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collaborating. And he will also collaborate and educate through his work. His position will therefore be that of permanent student and permanent educator.

The idea of the reciprocity approach that underlies his maieutic and his vision of architecture returns clearly. Responsibility and awareness motivate the drive for knowledge, which is never a form of erudition, but is the profound investigation carried out outside the ego that allows the ego to substantiate itself.

The primary objective of Távora's writing is also the aspect that makes it particularly topical; in short, that of the construction of a concept of democratic culture in the deepest sense of the term, in complete contrast to the expressions of fashions and the display of personal virtuosity.

This approach is fully in keeping with the climate of the ESBAP, led from 1952 onwards by Carlos Ramos, who had already called Távora as his assistant in 1951. A man of refined culture and a highly influential pedagogue, Ramos transformed the school into a centre of cultural debate, taking the opportunity to update the curricula and open up to international influences, in an exercise of careful handling of the pressures of the authoritarian regime.

On other occasions, Távora's thought develops through a more open form of doubt, in which critical and design reasoning moves with a trend that always displaces the problem forward and solves it more through compositional action than

Fig. 2

Fernando Távora, Three Sacred Places: Delphi, Acropolis of Athens, Olympia. Their topographical, aesthetic, religious and symbolic values. The importance of knowledge of the place and sensitivity to it for the architect's work. Sketch made during the course Teoria Geral da Organização da Espaço at the Faup, lecture November 23, 1990 (FIMS/AFT).

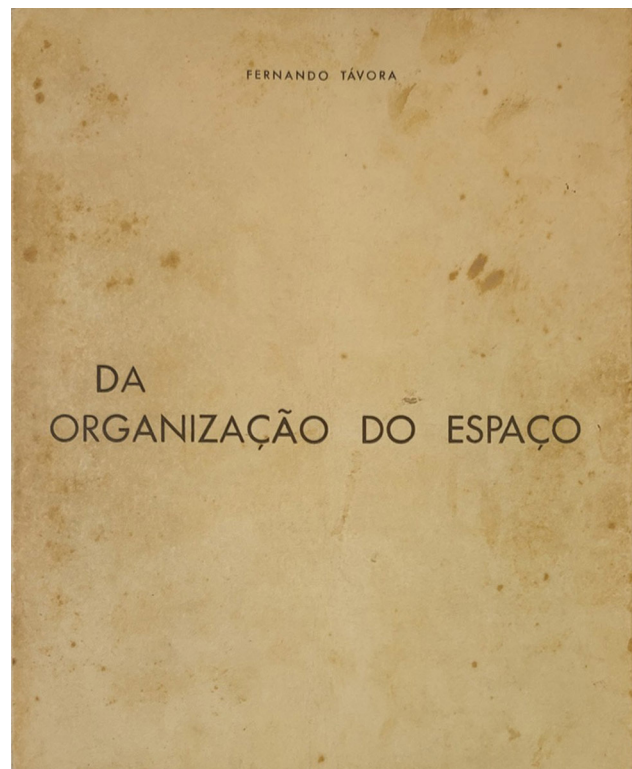
Fig. 3

Fernando Távora, Plan and schematic section of the city of Oporto, topographical relationship with the Douro river. Sketch made during the course Teoria Geral da Organização da Espaço at the Faup, lecture March 15, 1991 (FIMS/AFT).

through rhetorical exercise. His way of incorporating contradictions within the dynamic of mirroring between problems and solutions will make him famous, as will his ability to transpose the attitude of undermining the fixity of given certainties into architectural questions. These aspects, together with the “aptitude for heteronomy and attention to circumstantial conditions”³¹ represent the living inheritance of Fernando Pessoa’s thought, of whose works Távora is a devotee and collector.³² In this book, however, the academic contingency induces him to assume certain closures, certain fixed points that the author will reopen in later treatments.

A little over sixty years after this text was written, in the context of a culture that has translated individualisms into talents, legitimising the uncritical self-promotion of each “protagonist”, this invitation to the education of a well-founded culture of space appears as the definition of an antagonistic paradigm:

That, alongside an intense and necessary specialism, he puts a deep and indispensable humanism. May the architect be like this – man among men – organiser of space – a creator of happiness.



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³¹ Giovanni Leoni, “Oltre il ‘moderno’: l’architettura di Fernando Távora”, in Antonio Esposito and Giovanni Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera Completa* (Milano: Electa 2005) 40.

³² In this regard, it seems appropriate to mention that the reference to Fernando Pessoa’s thought represents an inescapable confrontation for Távora, which accompanies him from a very young age, continually leading him to confront the different interpretations of the concept of identity. In this vision, it is always to be understood as plural, in the multiplication of the ego. The acceptance of multiplicity is substantiated by the awareness of the set of factors in which our reality is articulated and on which each personal memory is also built.

Fig. 4

Da Organização do Espaço, Author’s edition, Porto 1962, cover (FIMS/AFT).

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