

# Fernando Távora and the Journey into the Constants as the Foundation of the Project (1950-1960)

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*Fernando Távora, Architectural Journey, Body and Architecture, Historical References in Design Process, Diario di Bordo*

## /Abstract

The text investigates the importance of travel in architect Távora's design process, highlighting how his travels influenced his architectural projects and how the structure of his design is based on the cognitive and bodily crossing of places. Távora's exploration of Portuguese culture and architecture played a crucial role in his focus on anonymous architecture and his emphasis on the geographical aspects of architecture. But the text also retraces the pages of the Diary kept by Távora during his "journey around the world" in 1960 – in particular, the visits to Japan and Athens – reading them in parallel with some of the architectural works designed by the same period.

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Giovanni Leoni (1958) teaches History of Architecture at the University of Bologna. His research focuses on the theory and practice of design between the 19th and 20th centuries with a particular focus on models of creativity, the relationship between Personality and Anonymity, and the role of architectural design in social and political processes. He is the author, with Antonio Esposito, of the monograph *Fernando Távora. Opera completa* published by Mondadori Electa (2005) and he edited, with Antonio Esposito and Raffaella Maddaluno, the critical edition in Italian of the *Diario di bordo* (LetteraVentidue, Siracusa, 2022; 2024), written by Fernando Távora on the occasion of his "trip around the world" (1960) financed by the Gulbenkian Foundation.

## Journey and Project

In the decade between 1950 and 1960, Fernando Távora intertwined intense design experimentation with a sequence of decisive journeys. In this chronology, the following text analyses and compares the design themes he experiments with and recognises while travelling and then applies them in his design practice.

This comparison aims to show how travel is not, for Távora, a simple training activity but an experience integrated into the design process. This process implies different concepts of travel as a foundational practice.

First the journey builds a cosmopolitan knowledge of different architectural cultures used for the work's success.

Then, the journey feeds a design process informed or based on geography.

Finally, the bodily action of the designer who crosses, again and again, the site on which the work will be built and then the work itself, under construction, is conceived by Távora as a journey as well.<sup>1</sup>

The text that follows does not always respect a strict chronological sequence for several reasons.

The first, historical one, is that both the projects and the travels of this decisive decade of Távora's activity are based on a single, wide-ranging cultural construction, in which book study, experimentation in design and travel are interwoven in a sequence, not linear but circular, of anticipations and verifications.

The second is that both the journeys and the projects are, for Távora, an experience open to the circumstances that can suddenly overturn established positions. Not a linear path, then, but the construction of a deliberately complex, contradictory identity, which seeks in the other from self the reinforcement of the self, and whose model is, as is well known, Fernando Pessoa.<sup>2</sup>

The third reason is that the acceptance of a circumstantial dimension of the design experience – be it an architectural project or a journey – derives from the desire to identify, in the variety of specific cases, constants of a supra – or trans-historical nature.

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1 The interest in Henri Bergson (1859-1941) that appears in Távora's youthful diaries, if related to a conception of the project as the investigation and emergence of a potential already existing in places, as an "attempt at exhausting a place" one might say après Georges Perec, could lead to the construction of a broad and useful system of references. Távora's interest in Bergson is mediated by the text *A Filosofia de Henri Bergson* by Leonardo Da Coimbra (1883-1936), a Portuguese philosopher and politician among the founders of the *Renascença Portuguesa* movement. The volume, written in 1932 – Leonardo Da Coimbra, *A Filosofia de Henri Bergson* (Lisboa: Renascença Portuguesa, 1932) – is mainly dedicated to *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, published by Bergson in Paris in the same year.

2 Of Pessoa, Távora writes: "he is a man who says that to be Portuguese, you must be the whole in every part. The concept is that identity derives from a great revelation; national identity must result, paradoxically, from knowledge of everything and everyone." (Fernando Távora, *Para a Edifícios* (1988) interview edited by Manuel Mendes, in: Fernando Távora, *Minha casa* (Porto: FIMS-FAUP, 2015): 13, eng. trans. in HPA n. 11 (2022), pp. 12-39. Pessoa's "heteronymy" – to which Távora constantly refers in his thinking, teaching, and design practice – is thus "a need for identity, to know oneself and one's multiple being, to identify with circumstances that are not one's own but which, in a world articulated in different identities, lead one to identify with others". (Ibid) On Távora's relations with Pessoa – of whose autographs he is also an important collector – see: Silvío Manuel Gomes Alves, *Fernando Távora no País do Desassossego*. (Dissertação de Mestrado Integrado em Arquitectura, orient. G. C. Moniz, Coimbra 2016); Juan Antonio Ortiz Orueta, "Influencia de Pessoa en el discurso de Fernando Távora. Pessoa's influence in Fernando Távora's discourse", *Cuadernos de Proyectos Arquitectónicos*, no. 6 (2016): 51-61; Ricardo Vasconcelos, Onésimo Almeida, Paulo de Medeiros, Jerónimo Pizatto, "New Insights into Portuguese Modernism from the Fernando Távora Collection", *Pessoa Plural. A Journal of Fernando Pessoa Studies*, no. 12 – Special Issue (Fall 2017).

In a fundamental writing of 1952 that we could consider programmatic of the analysed decade – *Arquitectura e urbanismo. A lição das constantes* – Távora defines this learning closely linked to travelling as the “lesson of the constants”, that is, the one that, through a knowledge based on a direct and physical encounter with the architectural works of the present and the past – of every work of the past, whether cultured or popular, authorial or anonymous – alone can offer the project a foundation of “perennial modernity”.<sup>3</sup>

### The Journey Across the Homeland

Távora’s first journey could be described as a *voyage autour de ma chambre*, a boyish Távora’s discovery of Portuguese culture in his family. While still a boy, moved by an early interest in popular art and architecture, he travelled and retraced the Portuguese territory to understand the structure, character, and cultural history of places. These trips were decisive in defining the specifics of Távora’s projects, almost all of which were to be in northern Portugal.

At the turn of the 1950s, following a parallel path within the School and as a member of the Professional Syndicate of Portuguese Architects, Távora’s journeys across Portugal were transformed from an individual act into a collective journey, a journey that stands as one of the foundations of Portuguese architectural culture in the second half of the 20th century.

The research on anonymous architecture as a lesson in authenticity, as a field for identifying the ‘constants’ of a ‘perennial modernity’ as an alternative to internationalist linguistic modernism, finds, in fact, the occasion for collective experimentation in the famous undertaking of the *Inquérito à Arquitectura Popular em Portugal*.<sup>4</sup>

The case, as an enterprise of professional organisation, is widely studied. However, it is essential to remember that, even within ESBAP and through Carlos

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<sup>3</sup> Fernando Távora, “Arquitectura e urbanismo. A lição das constantes”, *Lusitana, Revista ilustrada de Cultura*, no. 1-2 (November 1952), eng. trans. in HPA n. 11 (2022), 406-409.

<sup>4</sup> See: *Arquitetura Popular em Portugal* (Lisboa: Gravura, composição e impressão Gráfica São Gonçalo, 1961). The bibliography relating to *Inquérito* is extremely extensive and demonstrates the close ties of the investigation not only with the National Architects’ Union, which promotes it, but also with the Schools of Architecture and in particular with ESBAP directed by Ramos, who is also President of the local section of the Union. Among the most recent texts on the subject, rich in bibliographical references, see: João Leal, “O Vernáculo e o Híbrido: Concepções da Arquitectura Popular Portuguesa entre 1960 e 2000”, *Joelho*, no. 2 (2011): 39-57; José António Bandeirinha, “A lição da ponte de Rio de Onor”, *Joelho*, no. 2 (2011): 129-132; Maria Helena Maia, Alexandra Cardoso, *O Inquérito à Arquitectura Regional: contributo para uma historiografia do Movimento Moderno em Portugal*, In *IV Congresso de História de Arte Portuguesa* (Lisboa: APHA, 2012): 535-546; Joana Cunha Leal, Maria Helena Maia, A. Cardoso, eds, *Surveys on Vernacular Architecture: Their Significance in 20th Century Architectural Cultural* (Porto: CEAA, 2012); Pedro Vieira de Almeida, *Dois Parâmetros de Arquitectura Postos em Surdina: Leitura crítica do Inquérito à Arquitectura Regional* (Porto: CEAA, Edições Caseiras 2012); Alves Vera Marques, *Arte Popular e Nação no Estado Novo. A Política Folclorista do Secretariado da Propaganda Nacional* (Lisboa, Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2013); Maria Elena Maia, Alexandra Cardoso, Joana Leal, *Dois parâmetros de arquitectura postos em surdina. Leitura crítica do Inquérito à arquitectura regional* (Porto: CEAA, Edições Caseiras 2013); Joana Cunha Leal, Maria Helena Maia, Alexandra Cardoso eds., *To and fro: Modernism and vernacular architecture* (Porto: CEAA Editions, 2013); Ana Tostões, *A Idade Maior: Cultura e tecnologia na arquitectura moderna portuguesa* (Porto: FAUP, 2014); Santiago Gomes, *The portuguese way. L’Inquérito à arquitectura popular em Portugal and the search for an authentic modernity*, in Ugo Rossi, *Tradizione e modernità. L’influsso dell’architettura ordinaria nel moderno*, 63-77. (Siracusa: LetteraVentidue, 2015); Victor Mestre, “Arquitectura Portuguesa – la identidad en movimiento. La influencia de Inquérito à Arquitectura Popular em Portugal en la arquitectura de Posguerra”, *Rita*, no. 4 (2015): 30-41; Paula André, Carlos Sambricio, eds., *Arquitectura popular. Tradição e vanguardia Tradição y vanguardia* (Lisboa: DINÂMIA’CET-IUL 2016); Marta Lalanda Prista, *A memória de um Inquérito na cultura arquitectónica portuguesa* (Arcos de Valdevez: Município de Arcos de Valdevez 2016); Francisco Manuel Portugal e Gomes, “Inquérito à Arquitectura Regional Portuguesa: contributo para o entendimento das causas do problema da ‘casa portuguesa’” (Tese de Doutoramento em Arquitectura, Coimbra 2018, orient. M.J. Teixeira Krüger).

Ramos's specific interest, the investigation of popular architecture is introduced and accompanied by a focus on the geographical aspects of architecture.

In 1953, Ramos invited geographer Orlando Ribeiro (1911-1997) to teach a course on Human Geography at ESBAP, and in the same year, Távora produced with students an *Inquérito às expressões e técnicas tradicionais portuguesas* with the support of the Centro de Estudos Geográficos da Faculdade de Letras and the Centro de Etnologia Peninsular da Faculdade de Ciências do Porto, as part of a broader didactic work that, between 1952 and 1957, intertwined modern international and modern popular.<sup>5</sup>

The geographical vision that Távora considers the foundation of the project, a vision from which derives the non-accessory but structural relevance of traveling, thus has deep roots and, to a large extent, still merits investigation.

However, the ESBAP led by Ramos is not only the environment in which Távora's journeys through the Portuguese routes are transformed into national research on popular architecture.

Carlos Ramos,<sup>6</sup> in fact, director of the School and mentor of Távora, on the one hand, brings to the classroom a conception of the project capable of combining different references within Portuguese architectural culture, having been influenced by both Raul Lino and Miguel Ventura Terra. On the other hand, he is undoubtedly also the intermediary – like Lino himself, moreover – of a nineteenth-century English culture that elaborates the overcoming of eclecticism, replacing it with the idea of a “popular” language derived, without militant choices of style, from the unrestricted use of different historical languages made subordinate to local geographical conditions, construction logics, and living needs. Moreover, Ramos, although interested in modernist language innovations – which, as is well known, he was the first to introduce into ESBAP, influencing the group of new assistants to which Távora belonged – did not abandon his Beaux-Arts training and culture.<sup>7</sup>

By insisting on the fundamental role of circumstance, considering form as “a strategy referring to the specific place”, and rejecting “the pretence of being

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<sup>5</sup> In 1953, at the UIA Congress in Lisbon, Távora presented an exhibition developed within the School entitled *Técnicas Tradicionais da Arquitectura Portuguesa*; in 1956, at the CIAM in Dubrovnik, he presented a survey on the rural habitat developed with ESBAP students. On the same occasion, the Portuguese group formed by Távora, Viana de Lima, Octávio Lixa Filgueiras, Arnaldo Araújo and Carlos Carvalho Dias presented a project, developed for participation in the conference, concerning a new neighborhood for an agricultural community to be built in northern Portugal. For the importance of investigations into popular architecture in the development of ESBAP, see: Jorge Figueira, *A Escola do Porto. Um mapa crítico* (Porto: Edarq, 2018) now [Coimbra: edarq, 2002]; Gonçalo do Canto Moniz, *O Ensino Moderno da Arquitectura* (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 2019). Figueira, in particular, argues that the Inquerito represents a founding experience for the School of Porto because it provides a realist approach, an understandable and culturally sound basis for architectural design; it also translates a culturalist attitude and a sociological and anthropological focus that is significant in the School. See: Figueira, *A Escola do Porto. Um mapa crítico*, 49.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of the figure of Carlos Ramos see: *Carlos Ramos. Exposição retrospectiva da sua obra* (Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian. Serviço de Exposições e Museografia 1986). The figure of Ramos emerges, as is natural, in many passages of Távora's public and private writings. For a text dedicated to him, see: Fernando Távora, *Evocando Carlos Ramos*, text of the conference promoted by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation on 12 February 1986 and published in: *rA – Revista da Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto*, no. 0, (1987): 75.

<sup>7</sup> As a teacher, Ramos encouraged Távora not to use just one language but to experiment with several. In an interview with Javier Frechilla, Távora stated that Ramos “was compromised with the official classical language but, despite this, allowed his pupils to use other languages in a freer and more differentiated way.” See: Javier Frechilla, *Fernando Távora. Conversaciones en Oporto, Arquitectura*, no. 261, (July-August 1986): 22.

original”, Ramos undoubtedly contributes to consolidating the cosmopolitan vision of the project that characterises Távora’s work, of which the Portuguese anonymous architecture constitutes an initial piece.

Two projects realised in the second half of the 1950s testify to the ability to translate the constants found in the study of popular architecture into new architecture and, at the same time, to put these constants to the test of other cultures and other references that other journeys, about which we will soon speak, are introducing into the Távora’ project. A programme of work, moreover, clearly formulated in the text *Para um urbanismo e uma arquitectura portuguesas*, a year later than the aforementioned text on architectural constants, of which it is, to some extent, a translation in operational and design terms.

Do not close your eyes to the reality of the World – How could we isolate ourselves if one of the aspects of our reality is, rightly, our relationship with the World? Why not study, seriously, the works of the great modern architects and town planners to know how they apply to our case instead of making superficial and systematic statements against these same works? And, as we weave our relations with foreign currents, never forget the lesson of our history, remembering those masters who were called Ouguete, Boytac, Chanterene, Terzi, Nasoni, Ludovice, Mardel, and so many others.<sup>8</sup>

As mentioned, this is a cosmopolitan programme that involves travel as a basic means of implementation.

The project for the Municipal Park in the *Quinta da Conceição* (Matosinhos 1956 ff.) could be defined as the occasion in which walking, travelling, at first individual and then collective, through Portuguese territories, is transformed from a cognitive act into a design act.

In 1956, the Municipality of Matosinhos commissioned Távora to create a public park in an area occupied by the remains of the 15th century Franciscan convent of Nossa Senhora da Conceição, which, following the extinction of the religious orders in 1834, had become public property and abandoned to progressive decay. At the time of Távora’s intervention, only the remains of the cloister, some monumental fountains and the chapel of St. Francis remain on the grounds [Fig. 1, 2].



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The surrounding land, which has become the property of the port authority, houses a dock. The park programme – which will be realised only in part and

<sup>8</sup> Fernando Távora, *Para um urbanismo e uma arquitectura portuguesas*, *Comércio do Porto*, 25 Maio 1953 [24 Março 1953; 13 Dezembro 1955].

Fig. 1, 2  
Fernando Távora, Municipal Park in the Quinta da Conceição, Matosinhos (photo by the author).



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over a long period – includes a play area, sports facilities<sup>9</sup> and, of course, an overall arrangement of the archaeological remains, paths and greenery.

Távora decides not to tackle the lost image of the convent, of which he does not propose restitution, but to investigate the ‘spatial ritual’ of the place, to use one of his expressions.<sup>10</sup> This investigation, which generates the project, takes place by walking, repeatedly crossing, and ‘travelling’ within the place.

By shifting the design methodology from a figurative approach to an accentuation of the experiential nature of the project, Távora fits fully into the avant-garde of European and American culture that, on the one hand, takes up the tradition of late 19th-century Anglo-Saxon empiricism and on the other hybridises it with existentialist phenomenology. In the specific case of Távora, also with more specifically Portuguese or Iberian matrices such as J. Ortega y Gasset, who was very present in the writings of these years. In *Meditations on Quixote*, Ortega writes that ‘one of the most profound differences between the present century and the 19th century consists ‘in the change in our sensitivity to circumstances’.

Circumstance! Circum-stantia! That is, the mute things which are all around us. Very close to us, they raise their silent faces with an expression of humility and eagerness as if they needed our acceptance of their offering and, at the same time, were ashamed of the apparent simplicity of their gift.<sup>11</sup>

A theme that returns in *The Revolt of the Masses* with formulations that will be taken up by Távora almost literally in *The Organisation of Space* – the text that

<sup>9</sup> Among these facilities is the municipal swimming pool that Távora entrusted to the young collaborator Álvaro Siza (Álvaro Siza, *Piscina da Quinta da Conceição*, 1965-1966).

<sup>10</sup> “El edificio,” says Távora in a 1986 interview, “tiene un ritual, un ritual de espacio que nosotros debemos respetar. En caso contrario, estamos destruyéndolo completamente”. (Frenchilla, “Fernando Távora. Conversaciones en Oporto”, 28). This idea of a ritual approach to the project is appropriately emphasized in: Nieves Fernández Villalobos, *Parque Municipal y Piscina de la Quinta da Conceição 1956-1962*, in: *21 Edificios de Arquitectura Moderna en Oporto*, edited by, Daniel Villalobos, Sara Pérez, (Porto: Editorial Sever-Cuesta, 2010), 175-191.

<sup>11</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditaciones del Quijote* (Madrid: 1914) English translation: Id. *Meditations on Quixote*, translated by Evelyn Rugg, Diego Marin, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1961): 41.

closes and systematises the decade of travel and projects we are dealing with – where the Spanish philosopher is explicitly cited in a close connection with the Gulbenkian travel experience, which we will discuss in a moment.<sup>12</sup>

With Ortega, Távora also shares the idea that the dispersion of personality ‘among things’ is not a renunciation of individuality but, on the contrary, a broader and fuller realisation of it.

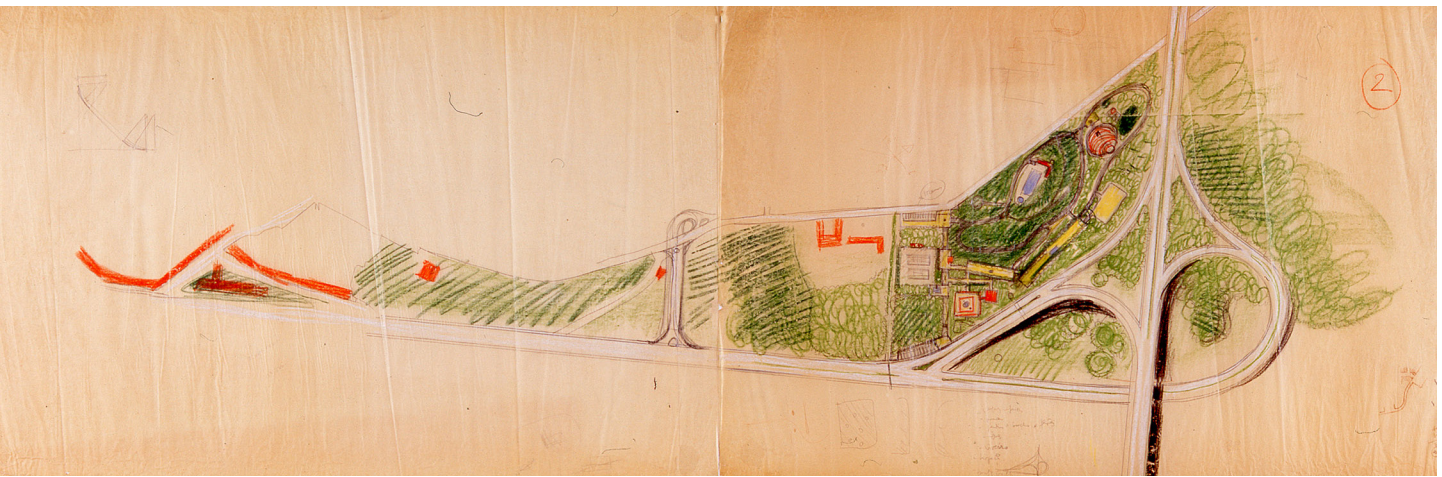
Being always me, always being circumstantial, always the same as myself and always different in accordance with circumstances – a kind of definition of tradition according to António Sardinha – “Tradition = permanence in continuity” – a balance between what is stable and what is fluctuating, a great variety – resulting from this circumstantialism – and a great unity resulting from my personalism... – 15/III/69.<sup>13</sup>

The project for the Quinta is therefore, first and foremost, a project of adherence to existing things, of dispersal of the self, of questioning the circumstance. Practices that imply as their foundation a study of crossings.

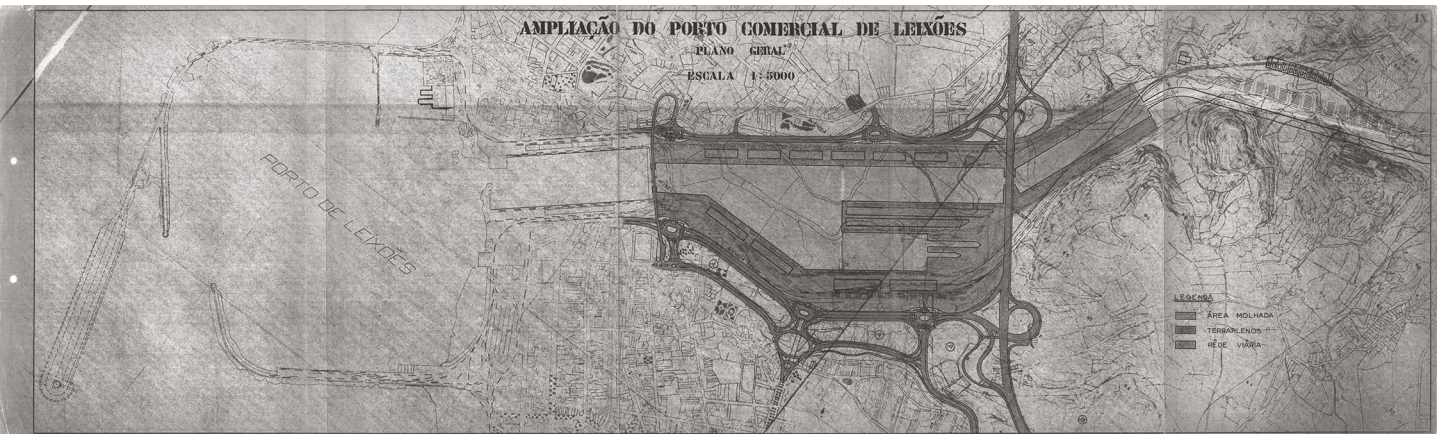
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12 Ortega y Gasset writes in his *La rebelión de las masas* (1930 English edition Id., *The Revolt of the Masses*. New York: W W Norton & Company Inc, 1932): ‘Life, which means primarily what is possible for us to be, is likewise, and for that very reason, a choice, from among these possibilities, of what we actually are going to be. Our circumstances – these possibilities form the portion of life given us, imposed on us. This constitutes what we call the world. Life does not choose its own world, it finds itself, to start with, not a world determined and unchangeable: the world of the present. Our world is that portion of destiny which goes to make up our life. But this vital destiny is not a kind of mechanism. We are not launched into existence like a shot from a gun, with its trajectory absolutely predetermined. The destiny under which we fall when we come into this world – it is always this world, the actual one consists in the exact opposite. Instead of imposing on us one trajectory, it imposes several, and consequently forces us to choose. Surprising condition, this, of our existence!’ (pp. 47-48) “When people talk of life, they generally forget something which to me seems most essential, namely, that our existence is at every instant and primarily the consciousness of what is possible to us. If at every moment we had before us no more than one possibility, it would be meaningless to give it that name. Rather it would be a pure necessity. But there it is: this strangest of facts that a fundamental condition of our existence is that it always has before it various prospects, which by their variety acquire the character of possibilities among which we have to make our choice... To say that we live is the same as saying that we find ourselves in an atmosphere of definite possibilities. This atmosphere we generally call our “circumstances.” All life means finding oneself in ‘circumstances’ or in the world around us. (in the footnote: See the prologue to my first book, *Meditaciones del Quijote*, Ávila: 1916). For this is the fundamental meaning of the idea “world.” The world is the sum-total of our vital possibilities. It is not then something apart from and foreign to our existence, it is its actual periphery. It represents what it is within our power to be, our vital potentiality. This must be reduced to the concrete in order to be realised, or putting it another way, we become only a part of what it is possible for us to be. Hence it is that the world seems to us something enormous, and ourselves a tiny object within it. The world or our possible existence is always greater than our destiny or actual existence. But what I wanted to make clear just now was the extent to which the life of man has increased in the dimension of potentiality. (pp. 40-41) Távora writes in his *Da Organização do Espaço* (Porto: 1962): “But, contrary to what men sometimes think, the forms they create, the spaces they organise, are not created or organised in a regime of total freedom; instead, they are profoundly pre-conditioned by an infinite number of factors, some of which are well present to their consciousness, others capable of acting on them at an unconscious level. It is difficult to indicate and describe the large number of different factors present in every man-made form and their relative influence. For if artificial or man-made forms, as well as the natural forms that are so important, are conditioning factors in every new form created, then man-made organised space is also conditioned in its organisation but, once organised, then becomes conditioning in relation to future organisations; and it is only for the sake of exposition convenience that one can separate the two aspects of an organised space, conditioned in the act of its creation and conditioning in its existence. To this combination of human and natural factors (and this distinction is only possible insofar as a phenomenon is observed on a human scale, but they are intimately linked factors), we will give the name ‘circumstance’. Circumstance will thus be, according to the very meaning of the term, the set of factors involving man, who, as the creator of many of them, will have to place side by side with them those that result from his very existence from his being.” (p. 21-22) “The importance that forms have in the lives of men ... [has as its consequence] ... the responsibility of every man in the organisation of the space that surrounds him. The responsibility derives from the fact that man must be aware of how the organisation of space, although subject to circumstance, is not ‘fatally determined’ by it and offers the possibility of the organiser’s active intervention; and he must also be aware that space, once organised, itself becomes circumstance. The two aspects, freedom of choice of form while accepting a circumstance and awareness of the importance assumed by an organised space, must be the foundation of the activity of a space organiser. From this, it follows that man, in creating a form, must take a position, both because he is not obliged to submit to the circumstance passively, and because the circumstance can present absolutely negative aspects and it would be cowardly to go along with them instead of fighting them, all the more so knowing that in creating forms, circumstances are created, which can improve or worsen these aspects.” (p. 24)

13 Fernando Távora, “Prologue”, in Távora, *“Minha casa”*, 28.



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The first planning decision concerns the general road system of the area, which Távora requests to modify to prevent the access plan to the Port from impacting the Park. This idea will later be developed in the Port of Leixões Expansion Plan [Fig. 3, 4].<sup>14</sup>

He then sets four entrances, only partly realised as planned, and develops the intervention by redefining a network of paths and passages that connect the existing and newly built elements without a hierarchy of relevance, without a distinction between natural and artificial elements.

The guiding principle applied is a central theme in Távora's design method: continuity.

A spatial and temporal continuity that requires, in the design process, moments of abandonment of representation as the primary tool in favour of a gestural, experiential, bodily dimension of which walking is the foundation.

Távora, recounting in retrospect his work in the *Quinta da Conceição*, describes it as the activity of a 'prior of the convent':

I used to walk with the bricklayers and gardeners, telling them what to do. There was an employee who gave me advice, and I often followed

Fig. 3  
Fernando Távora, Municipal Park in the Quinta da Conceição, Matosinhos, sketch for the modification of the general road system in the area (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 4  
Fernando Távora, Extension Plan for the Commercial Port of Leixões, 1958 (FIMS/AFT).

14 Fernando Távora, *Ampliação do Porto Comercial de Leixões*, Mathosinhos, 1958 ff.



it. All this happened in a very familiar, almost domestic, atmosphere, thanks to the support of the Mayor, a very sensitive man who did not attach great importance to money and believed that the important thing was to do things well.<sup>15</sup>



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The usual narrative tone of the project reports drawn up by Távora for the public narrative actually conceals radical and innovative choices, all of which can be classified under the category of continuity.

Continuity of time and space, as mentioned, which removes the project from abstraction and the selective action of representation in order to build a unicum composed of found elements [Fig. 5], kept as such or reorganised, mixed with elements built from scratch.

Continuity of knowledge and practice between designer and workers, the former's foundation for the abandonment of representation.

Continuity between political decision and design action, thus between the designer and the community to which the work is destined, profiling the idea of the project as a shared task dear to Távora.

A continuity that, in compositional terms, not only does not generate indifference but, on the contrary, enhances the specificity of each element brought back into the design action, eliminating any difference between preserving or restoring (actions that Távora, on other design occasions, knows how to isolate and masterfully perform) and inventing.

The place is treated as an existing score, understood and accepted in the project, on which to intervene – to remain in the musical metaphor not inappropriate for a moment in which Távora is still vague a 'harmonic' space – with variations and accents.

Some elements of invention, then, perform the function of creating a hierarchy in the continuity of the place.

In particular, three architectures, all characterised by their being at once elements with a precise formal identity but also devices of exchange, of connection, of highlighting the "profound relationships" that the project intends to emphasise: the swimming pool, the design of which Távora entrusts to Álvaro

Fig. 5  
Fernando Távora, Municipal Park in the Quinta da Conceição, Matosinhos (photo by the author).

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15 Antonio Esposito, Giovanni Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera completa* (Milano: Electa, 2005): 339.

Siza – a choice that generates a game of adherence and difference to the overall principles of the project in itself worthy of attention –, the Red Pavilion and the Tennis Pavilion, both designed by Távora [Fig. 6, 7].

If in the Municipal Park project the role of travel is manifested in its experiential dimension of crossing places and connecting, through walking, things and times, in the *Tennis Pavilion* (1956-60) the role of travel – in the broad sense in which we understand it – is enriched with different meanings.

First of all, Távora experiences a specific aspect of the lesson learnt through the trip across his homeland, namely the precise knowledge of the construction grammar of Portuguese popular architecture, more precisely of Northern Portugal.

It is, in fact, a fundamental complement to the experiential dimension of the project already underlined.

Only thanks to the profound knowledge of the building tradition, only thanks to this knowledge shared with the workers, can the cognitive crossing of places, deprived of representation as the primary means of the project, be transformed into a project. The knowledge and exercise of constants become the foundation for building the spatial and temporal continuity mentioned above.

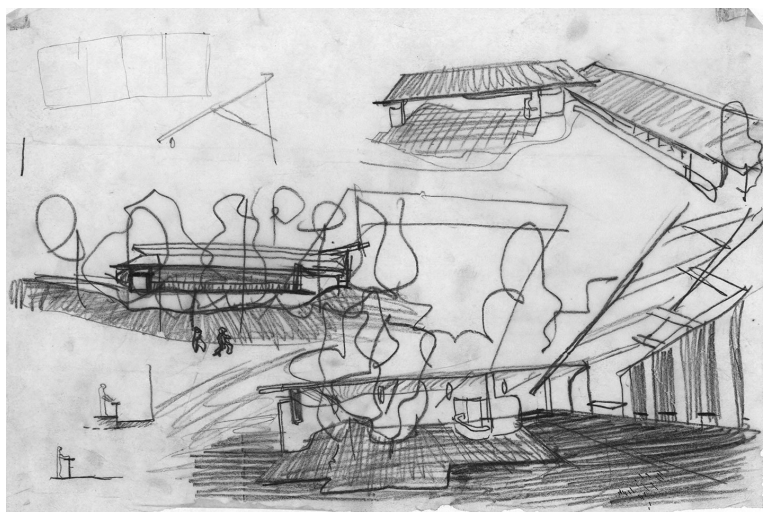
The connection between the design theme of crossing and the importance of constructive exactitude emerges from an apparently self-deprecating remark made by Távora in the project report:

There was the problem of marking the park with a building, creating an object with presence, affirming the axis of the tennis courts and serving as a landmark, as is the case with Siza's swimming pool. The most curious fact is that the grandstand in the pavilion does not work because it is uncomfortable, and the visibility on the courts is bad; this does not bother me much because it is another case, among many, whose highest praise is that it serves no purpose.<sup>16</sup>

The radically anti-functionalist position thus expressed has, in reality, deep roots connected with the idea of walking, of traversing places as a cognitive and



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Fig. 6  
Fernando Távora, Red Pavilion, Municipal Park in the Quinta da Conceição (photo by the author).

Fig. 7  
Álvaro Siza, Perspective sketches for the study of the swimming pool pavilions, corresponding to a version of the project delivered to the Matosinhos Town Hall in June 1958 (drawing digitised at Fernando Távora's studio, with his authorisation, during research for the publication of the monograph Antonio Esposito, Giovanni Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera completa*, Electa Mondadori: Milan, 2005).

16 Esposito, Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera completa*, 319.

meditative act, a reflective walking to which Távora recognises an ancient Greek root, as we shall see, and which implies pause, idleness. A cognitive power is attributed to the suspension of action, which Távora also finds in his beloved Pessoa: "Ah, what a pleasure it is not to perform a duty".<sup>17</sup>

This idea is related, returning to architecture, to a particular idea of decoration understood not as an act positive but as a result inherent "in what is left out", according to an expression that Távora borrows from Francisco de *Hollanda's Da Pitura*. The space that is left out as an act of suspension of design process has the same value as the space that is occupied, an idea that Távora will develop in a theoretical key in the text *Da Organização do Espaço* but that we see, put into practice before theory, in the use-



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less space of pause, in the emptiness as a connecting element that the *Tennis Pavilion* represents within the *Quinta* [Fig. 8].<sup>18</sup>

The uselessness of the Pavilion, its being an 'ornament' of the Quinta, implies and allows the constructive precision that Távora dedicates to the small building to be understood as an exercise in the legitimacy of building action, in essentiality and correctness in the display of archetypal constructive acts, of constants: founding, supporting, covering, separating and placing space in continuity.<sup>19</sup>

The transcription of the popular grammar, the translation of the 'archaeological' knowledge gathered thanks to the *Inquérito* into a living language is, in itself, a design result fully coherent with the rejection of any stylistic recovery of tradition affirmed in Távora's first relevant text published, *O problema da casa*

17 "Ai que prazer / Não cumprir um dever, / Ter um livro para ler / E não fazer! / Ler é maçada, / Estudar é nada. / Sol doira / Sem literatura / O rio corre, bem ou mal, / Sem edição original. / E a brisa, essa, / De tão naturalmente matinal, / Como o tempo não tem pressa." (Oh what a pleasure / Not fulfilling a duty, / Having a book to read / And not doing it! / To read is a bore, / To study is nothing. / The sun shines / Without literature / The river flows, good or bad, / Without original edition. / And the breeze, that one, / Is so naturally matutinal, / As time has no hurry...). See: Fernando Pessoa, *Poesias*, nota explicativa de João Gaspar Simões and Luiz de Montalvor (Lisboa: Ática, 1942): 244.

18 Fernando Távora, *Da Organização do Espaço* (Porto: FAUP Publicações, 1999): 18. In fact, the reference to Francisco de *Hollanda's* phrase – "Decorum is what one neglects to do" (*Da Pitura Antigua*, a text from 1548 that Távora quotes in an annotated edition Joaquim de Vasconcelos, published in Porto by Renascença Portuguesa in 1918, p. 172) already appears in the *Diário de "bordo"* that Távora kept during the Gulbenkian trip in 1960 on the occasion of a conversation about Paul Rudolph with Eduard Franz Sekler (21 March). Of the *Diary* there exists an *editio princeps* with anastatic reproduction, Portuguese transcription and English translation promoted by the Associação Casa da Arquitectura in Matosinhos, coordinated by Álvaro Siza and edited by Rita Marnoto (Fernando Távora, *Diário de "bordo"*, Matosinhos: Associação Casa da Arquitectura 2012). We also refer, for apparatus and annotations, to the Italian edition: Antonio Esposito, Giovanni Leoni, Raffaella Maddaluno, *Fernando Távora. Diario di bordo* (Siracusa: LetteraVentitdue, 2022). In what follows, reference will also be made, as appropriate, to the two editions, indicating only the day of reference.

19 On the connection between ornament, order and the legitimacy of building, the studies of Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy remain of reference, useful also for the reconstruction of Távora's specific cultural framework ("Ornament", *The Art Bulletin*, no. XXI, (1939): 375-382). Coomaraswamy is, moreover, one of the authors cited by Távora in his text on *The Organisation of Space* (Távora, *Da Organização do Espaço*, 20).

Fig. 8

Fernando Távora, Tennis Pavilion, Municipal Park in the Quinta da Conceição, Matosinhos (FIMS/AFT).

*Portuguesa*<sup>20</sup> – a text that opposed a cultural vision founded on the isolation of Portugal – and with the opposite idea of ‘perennial modernity’ traced through a cosmopolitan knowledge founded on the journey, developed in the aforementioned text *A lição das constantes* [Fig. 9, 10, 11].



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However, the design exercise does not end with this complex task; the dates are essential in highlighting other aspects.

Távora designed the *Tennis Pavilion* in 1956 and completed its construction in 1960. The project begins at the immediate conclusion of the study trip requested by the *Inquérito*, and it concludes on the return of the Gulbenkian trip, the last in a series that, during the decade, brings him into contact with post-war Modernist culture. We will say at once about these trips, this “anarchic” crossing of the Modern, as Távora defines it, but the *Pavilion*, more than any writings or theoretical elaboration, albeit in full coherence with the cultural passages witnessed in the writings, demonstrates the operational outcomes of a study of “the works of the great modern architects and urbanists, in order to know how they are applicable to our case”, according to the programme mentioned above.

<sup>20</sup> Published in the weekly *Aléo* on 10 November 1945 then published, in a revised and expanded form, as the first volume of the *Cadernos de Arquitectura* in 1947.

Fig. 9, 10, 11

Photographic image of the Tennis Pavilion (photo by the author) compared with pages from the resulting volume of *Inquérito: Arquitectura Popular em Portugal*, (Lisboa: Gravura, composição e impressão Gráfica São Gonçalo, 1961: 179, 105).

What is clear is above all the absence of any possible militancy of modernist revisionism.

The Pavilion does not reinterpret in a regional key the canonised architectural innovations of pre-war Modernism: decomposition of tectonic nodes, free plan, isomorphic space, modelling of the void, spatial continuity between interior and exterior. Rather, he translates traditional Portuguese construction, from the tectonic node to spatial articulation, into an actualised architectural practice, tracing common roots between local traditions and modernist canons.

It is a subtle game from which the “modern” emerges not denied but recomposed in a broader thought, shown in its roots, and brought back to a timeless elementality. With an act of constructive clarity, Távora accomplishes, at the same time, an actualisation of the processes captured in anonymous historical architecture and a reduction to the history of 20th century linguistic inventions [Fig. 12].



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Bringing both Portuguese tradition and 20th century innovation back into the sphere of the constants of the ‘perennial modern’ is, after all, based on a key principle in Távora’s project, namely a cosmopolitan vision in the use of architectural languages. A cosmopolitan vision that saves what is local from the vernacular, leading it back to universal principles and what is ‘foreign’ from the homologation of internationalism. A revolutionary principle with respect to cultural imperialism based on technocracy of which he would find the maximum expression when he travelled to the USA in 1960 thanks to the Gulbenkian Foundation, opposing it, as we shall see, with a programme that was as far-sighted as it was tragically losing in the context of architectural culture in the second half of the 20th century.

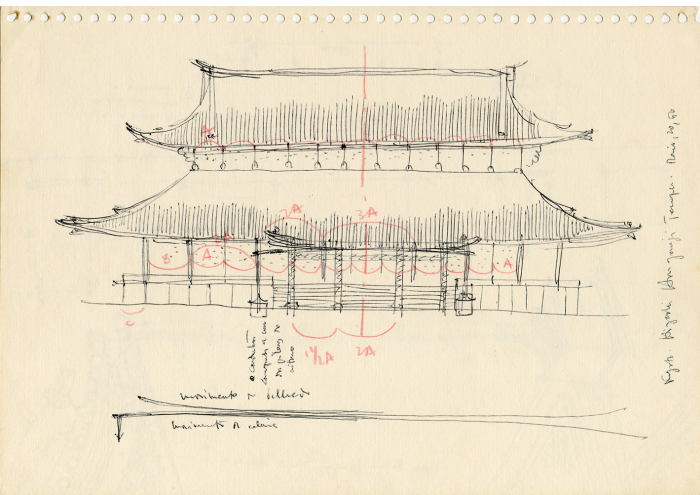
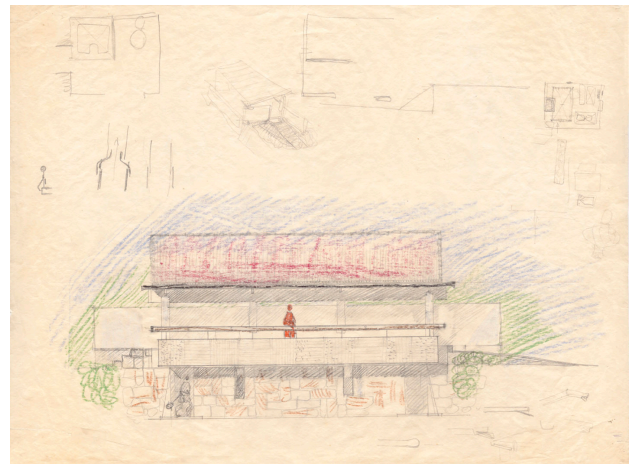
In a text of his maturity, Távora describes his project to replace internationalism with a renewed cosmopolitanism as a character of contemporary Portuguese architecture:

We believe that the thinking behind contemporary Portuguese architecture, of its most representative sectors, does not forget, but rather practices, this tradition of ours that has been mentioned: not imposing, but sympathising and understanding, capable of understanding people and their places, guaranteeing their buildings and spaces identity and variety, as in a phenomenon of heteronymy in which the author demultiplies himself, not due to conceptual or other incapacity, but due to the principle of respect, when deserved, that we owe to our neighbour. This way of being in the world, in

Fig. 12  
Fernando Távora, Tennis Pavilion, Municipal Park in the Quinta da Conceição, Matosinhos (photo by the author).

truth, does not come from the weakness of the creator in the presence of the other, of his place and time; on the contrary, it is exactly the result of the creative consideration of the other's substance and circumstance.<sup>21</sup>

Returning to the design of the Pavilion, it is sufficient to compare three contemporary drawings – the design of the Pavilion, the drawing of the Robie House (contained in the *Diary* as of 16 April 1969) and a sketch of the Higashi-Honganji temple in Kyoto (*Logbook*, Notebook A, 20 May 1960) [Fig. 13, 14, 15] to understand how Távora's cosmopolitanism translates into an ability to draw on historical sources by making them operative and vital in favour of a project that does not, therefore, become historicist. Rather, the principle is the strengthening and perfecting of one's own language through understanding, accepting and searching for the common roots of other languages.



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### The 'Anarchic' Journey into the Modern

The journey to his homeland to discover Portuguese popular culture began genealogically within the family. But it is still the privileged family situation that offers Távora, in a Portugal isolated due to the Salazarian dictatorship, the opportunity to undertake foreign travels while still in his twenties. The urgencies that lead him to the 'indispensable' practice of travelling are twofold and soon become intertwined with travelling abroad.

The first is an individual need, a 'spiritual duty' as Távora would define it, to investigate the axis of 'Greece, Rome, Christendom, Europe', according to the synthesis of the beloved Pessoa.<sup>22</sup> We will say more about this later.

21 Fernando Távora, *Imigração/Emigração. Cultura Arquitectónica Portuguesa no Mundo*. In: *Arquitectura do Seculo XX. Portugal*, (Munich – New York: Prestel, 1997): 141-142. On this subject, we refer to our Giovanni Leoni, *Cosmopolitanism versus Internationalism: Távora, Siza and Souto Moura*. In: Francisco Bethencourt, ed., *Cosmopolitanism in the Portuguese-Speaking World*. (Leiden: Brill, 2017): 163-219.

22 "Grécia, Roma, Cristandade, / Europa – os quatro se vão/ Para onde vai toda idade. / Quem vem viver a verdade / Que morreu D. Sebastião?" See: Fernando Pessoa, *Mensagem* (Lisboa: Parceria A.M. Pereira, 1934): III, I, 2.

Fig. 13  
Fernando Távora, Tennis Pavilion, Municipal Park in the Quinta da Conceição, Matosinhos, overall sketch (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 14  
Fernando Távora, Higashi-Honganji Temple in Kyoto, 20 May 1960, from the *Diário de "bordo"* (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 15  
Fernando Távora, Sketch of Robie House, Chicago, 16 April 1960, from the *Diário de "bordo"* (FIMS/AFT).

The second requirement stems from his choice to enrol at the *Escola Superior de Belas-Artes do Porto* to become an architect and from his meeting with Carlos Ramos, a key figure in his training and the start of his academic career. Ramos arrived at ESAP as a lecturer in 1940, two years before Távora's enrolment. He became its Director in 1952 when he had just chosen Távora and other young graduates as a volunteer assistant. Committed to the ministerial reform of the teaching of architecture, a reform centred on overcoming the stylistic Beaux-Arts tradition in favour of a new figure more oriented towards technical knowledge and social commitment, Ramos brought the themes of modernism into the school, having Le Corbusier as his main reference and, for the teaching model, above all Walter Gropius and his "democratic pedagogy" experimented at Harvard between 1938 and 1952. In addition to the school, Ramos involved his young assistants in the activities of ODAM, the *Organização dos Arquitectos Modernos*, founded in 1947.

Among the favourite destinations of Távora's first trips as an architecture student, however, is Italy, in the 1940s. A first trip, which by Távora's standards could be said to have been improvised, in 1947 and a second, more methodically prepared, in 1949.<sup>23</sup> In Italy, Távora visited the Torre Piacentini in Genoa, inaugurated in 1940, and the Centro Piacentiniano in Bergamo (1912-1927), the works of Figini and Pollini in Ivrea, the Palazzo delle Poste in Naples (Giuseppe Vaccaro and Gino Franzi, 1933-1936); he was interested in the work of the BBPR in Milan, and visited Como to see Terragni. Among his primary interests was town planning, with a particular focus on the QT8 presented at the 1947 Triennale by Bottoni.<sup>24</sup>

An interest in Italian architecture, as we can see, also driven by curiosity towards authors who, like Piacentini, had worked in Porto and with whom Távora would directly confront himself in his first years of profession, as town planner for the Municipality, elaborating the *Plan for Campo Alegre* (Porto, 1948) and the *Plan for Avenida da Ponte* (Porto, 1955). But above all a curiosity dictated by the affinity he felt with the most innovative Italian research in the common framework of the need for a 'new realism', of a non-historicist but 'vital' relationship with the past, of a confrontation with the historical city as a lesson of modernity, of the definition of new tasks for architecture in the changed framework of post-war Europe and of a break, not simply revisionist, with the dictates of early 20th-century modernism. A profound affinity that, in its most immediate form, will show itself in projects such as that for the *Aveiro Centre* (1963 ff.).

However, the first European trips were also driven by the urgency of encountering the work of the guiding figure in Távora's education, Le Corbusier, from life. An urgency that soon becomes the most painful of disillusion.

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23 It is worth mentioning that in 1947, the ICAT (*Iniciativas Culturais Arte e Técnica*) group in Lisbon, in which Francisco Keil do Amaral (1910-1975) is a leading figure, took over the editorship of the magazine *Arquitectura*, which in the following years was an important intermediary between Portuguese and Italian architectural culture. On this subject, see: Lavinia Ann Minciocchi, "From Casabella to *Arquitectura*. The Italian influence of Portuguese post CIAM debate", in *Revisiting the post-CIAM generation*, edited by Nuno Correia, Maria Helena Maia, Rute Figueiredo (Porto: ESAP, 2019): 232-250.

24 In relation to these early trips to Italy see: Giorgio Liverani, *Context and Project. Italian Influences on Fernando Távora's Architecture*, Bologna 2017 (Doctoral Thesis, University of Bologna, Department of Architecture, Tutor Antonio Esposito) and the extract published in HPA n. 11 (2022), 450-485.

Five years before the in-person meeting in Hoddesdon, on 27 September 1947, Távora had written from Marseilles to his fiancée telling of having seen the model of the *Unité d'Habitation*.

My admiration for Le Corbusier is so great that the Marseille model represents for me, together with the original works by Picasso in the Barcelona Museum, the strongest feeling or pleasure I have experienced on this trip because Le Corbusier is “the Great Man, the Master” the creator of most modern solutions and above all the one who orients all the work that will be done in Europe in the next 100 years.<sup>25</sup>

But in 1952, the encounter with his built work is of an entirely different tone: “A delirium ... and a sadness because all dreams come to an end. Reality is sadness”.<sup>26</sup>

A criticism of Le Corbusier’s built work that he would return to on several occasions, accompanied by more general objections to the Swiss master’s cultural project to which he nevertheless remained bound by a tormented relationship, both of identification and of overcoming, for the whole of his life, attempting until the very end to interpret it in a way that would tear him away from internationalism and lead him back to his own cosmopolitan vision of architecture, appealing precisely to the relevance of travel in the Swiss master’s work.

In his text on *The Organisation of Space*, which, as mentioned, is in many respects a synthesis of the decade 1950-1960, Távora attributes to the Swiss master the “negative responsibilities” of “famous men” – “the Le Corbusier, the Aalto, the Wrights” – who steer us away from “the path of our personal references” with “utopian” illusions of internationalism when their work “represents a minimal portion of our organised space and, as we move towards anonymity, the confusion, lack of coherence and chaos become more and more acute”.<sup>27</sup>

But in the *lectio magistralis* given in the Sala dei Dogi of the Ducal Palace in Venice on the occasion of the *Laurea Honoris Causa* awarded to him by the IUAV on 29 April 2003, two years before his death, Távora, quoting as a reference, with sublime *sprezzatura*, the Venetian ‘Gazzettino’ of 24 September 1952, evokes a lecture given in the city by Le Corbusier, ‘whose real name,’ he specifies, ‘was Charles-Eduard Janneret’. With a subtle heteronymic procedure, Távora evokes a Le Corbusier who describes “Venice as the marvellous city that takes on in itself, after centuries of history, the most bizarre architectural contrasts, but which, despite this, shows itself to be harmoniously complete, intact in all its particularity, greyed by the hand of time”. An almost literal quotation from *The Stones of Venice* by the beloved Ruskin. In a few passages, Távora

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25 Fernando Távora, “Viagem pel Europa”, in Távora, “*Minha Casa*”, 23.

26 Fernando Távora, diaristic note reported in Manuel Mendes, *Ah, che ansia umana di essere il fiume o la riva!*, in Esposito, Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera completa*, 344-345.

27 Távora, *Da Organização do Espaço*, 42.



then takes “the Swiss Le Corbusier”, born in the “small town of La Chaux-de-Fonds”, back to his origins, to his relationship with Charles L’Eplattenier, hinting at the cancellation of that education and the *damnatio memoriae* of his early works linked to his birthplace by the publicists, right from the first edition of the *Complete Works*. He then cites Cingria-Vaneyre’s *Les Entretiens de la Villa du Rouet*<sup>28</sup> in relation to “a specific artistic identity for French-speaking Switzerland” whose spirit is “Mediterranean and not Nordic” to the extent that “its art must cease to be influenced by Germany and return once again to Greco-Latin classicism.” Távora recounts, next, a Le Corbusier travelling between Rome and Constantinople, between Athens and Pompeii. “The consideration in which he held Cingria’s book,” he concludes, “Jeanneret’s love for his *Suisse-romande* ‘homeland’, his historical knowledge of Mediterranean culture and all of Le Corbusier’s subsequent creative work, come to mark the furrows of contemporary architecture and urbanism strongly”.<sup>29</sup>

The journeys of knowledge of the modern then became professional, crowded with personal encounters with the elites of world modernist architectural culture. He travelled to Morocco for the UIA congress in 1951, then back to Italy in 1952 to attend the CIAM summer school at the IUAV in Venice, where he consolidated his Italian acquaintances (Rogers, Astengo, Piccinato, Zevi) and attended, in admiration, the lectures by Le Corbusier and Lúcio Costa.

These journeys are complemented by trips to attend CIAMs as an ODAM member.

In 1952, Alfredo Viana de Lima (1913-91) and Fernando Távora were in Hoddesdon for the first Portuguese participation. Sigfried Giedion and Josep Lluís Sert had invited Viana de Lima as a delegate from Portugal. The invitation to participate in the activities of the Congresses causes the ODAM to be rethought and aligned with the CIAM objectives, assuming – not without a protracted internal debate – even the identity of CIAM Porto, a specification that is not necessary because no other CIAM groups will exist in the country.<sup>30</sup>

Regardless of the *sprezzatura* that always characterises his frequentation of the elites of international architecture, Távora’s participation in the CIAMs is – in his own words – an interesting experience but lived with detachment, and his personal encounter with Le Corbusier on such occasions, an ‘honour’ but out of time.<sup>31</sup>

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28 Alexandre Cingria-Vaneyre, *Les entretiens de la Villa du Rouet: essais dialogués sur les arts plastiques en Suisse romandexi* (Genève: A. Jullien Editeur, 1908).

29 The Laurea Honoris Causa, strongly endorsed by Francesco Dal Co, was conferred by the then Rector Carlo Magnani in the Sala dei Dogi of the Doge’s Palace. The text of the *Lectio* delivered by Távora on 29 April 2003 is published in HPA n. 11 (2022), 410-423.

30 See: Pedro Vieira de Almeida, Maria Helena Maia, “As décadas pós-Congresso – Os anos 50”, *História da Arte em Portugal*, no. 14 (1986): 147-153; Alexandra Trevisan, “Influências Internacionais na Arquitectura Moderna no Porto (1926-1956)”, Tese de doutoramento, Universidad de Valladolid, Director: Prof. R. Rodriguez Llera, 2013; Maria Helena Maia, Alexandra Cardoso, *Portugueses in CIAM X. In 20th Century New Towns. Archetypes and Uncertainties*, edited by Paolo Marcolin and Joaquim Flores (Porto: CEAA e DARQ, 2014), 193-213.

31 Fernando Agrasar, “Eu realmente não posso ver uma janela sen ver do lado de lá: Entrevista con Fernando Távora”, in *Fernando Távora, exhibition catalogue* (Guimarães: Departamento Autónomo de Arquitectura da Universidade do Minho, 2003): 18.

In Otterlo, the last CIAM meeting in 1959, Távora participated in the work of Team X.<sup>32</sup> He was also invited to the meeting in Bagnols-sur-Cèze in July 1960, but had to cancel due to travel. He will finally take part, “with a certain shyness” and without presenting work, in the meeting in Royaumont in 1962, an experience to which he will dedicate a key text with respect to his definitive distance from all post-war modernist revisionism.

In *O encontro de Royaumont*, published in 1963, Távora draws a parallel between “the men of the Athens Charter” – who, albeit with difficulty, “produced a document in which paths were indicated, where uncertainty did not exist and where a grammar and a few key words made it possible to establish a common language” – and the impossibility, thirty years later, of reaching a similar shared conclusion because:

Times and dimensions have changed... reality is more diverse, richer and more varied. It is not possible, as yet, to give recipes, to classify with sovereignty, to hierarchize with exactitude. To our eyes and to our minds, the world is complex, elusive. Unusual. We get to know man better, we begin to unmask social phenomena and, in parallel, everything becomes more complicated. Contacts increase, new cultures come into play, concepts become relative, the field of technical sciences widens, in a word, man and the World flourish in unusual aspects. One senses that it is a time of research and doubt, of reencounter, of drama and mystery. How, therefore, can one conclude with clarity?<sup>33</sup>

As mentioned, both the learning of Modernism and the traversal of the post-war revisionist projects of modernism do not correspond to a convinced militancy – although not excluding enthusiasms and passions on that front as well – but are marked, from the outset, by a substantial disdain.

Already in a long diary note, dated 18 November 1946, Távora writes:

There is only one thing that I would perhaps really be, but I am not, because blood prevents me, because some force I have not yet freed myself of (and I say fortunately) does not allow me to; I could only be an anarchist today, and in part, I must recognise that I already am one. Somewhere, Spengler says that we all today have something of the communist, but I would say instead, we all today have something of the anarchist. I have tried, by reading, structuring and thinking, to become a modern man, like one who from one day to the next decides to become European to Asian; I have therefore made an intellectual effort that has led me to all the fields of modern thought, or some of them, that, as far as possible, I have known. As an outsider, I have passed in front of each of the modern manifestations, especially those of art, and observed them,

32 According to Álvaro Siza's testimony, at the last CIAM Távora “is closer to Coderch's thinking on traditional Catalan houses and not Candilis' thinking on new cities; he is closer to the ‘rebels’ Van Eyck and the young Italians, not Bakema and his ‘triumphant reconstruction’”. See: Álvaro Siza, “Fernando Távora 1923”, in José António Bandeirinha (ed.), *Fernando Távora. Modernidade permanente. Permanet modernity* (Matosinhos: Casa da Arquitectura, 2012): 266-267. For a contextual overview see: E. Fernandes, *The tectonic shift in Fernando Távora work in the post-CIAM years*. In *Revisiting the post-CIAM generation*, edited by Correia, Maia, Figueiredo, 120-134.

33 Fernando Távora, “O encontro de Royaumont”, *Arquitectura*, no. 73 (1963): 1.

allowing myself to study them, always crying, in front of each one my own point of view; in a word, I have become a neutral in all matters. I abandoned one party, one point of view, to take all parties and all points of view, analysing and dissecting each one.<sup>34</sup>

### The Gulbenkian Journey: the Diary

The trip for which Távora gave up the Bagnols-sur-Cèze meeting was the 'trip around the world' he made, thanks to a grant from the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, from 13 February to 12 June 1960, a trip often described as the most important of his life. The text on *Royaumont* and the coeval *On the Organisation of Space*, but especially the identity as a designer developed by Távora in the early 1960s, owe much to the Gulbenkian trip.

The journey's *Diary*<sup>35</sup> kept as a private document throughout his life, bears witness to the completion of the 'anarchic' journey into the 'modern' – with a final and decisive 'showdown' with F.L. Wright – but goes further, offering an encounter not with the 'modernism' of elite architectural culture, but with a 'modern condition', a global contemporary condition that the European travels could not offer him.

The Gulbenkian journey is a journey that surpasses the two previous ones – the journey across the homeland and the 'anarchic' journey into the Modern – because, on the one hand it leads Távora to dismiss any illusions of being able to return to the supposed harmony of popular cultures and, on the other, it makes him realise once and for all how the influence of the 'great men', the 'geniuses' protagonists of early 20th-century modernism was, on the real world, extremely limited.

A journey, the Gulbenkian, shows how the tasks of architecture have radically changed.

The trip's impact on Távora's project stems, perhaps, also from the fact that it is not a personal cultural project, as Távora's trips almost always are, but a task assigned by Ramos as Director of ESBAP.<sup>36</sup> Távora is preparing the

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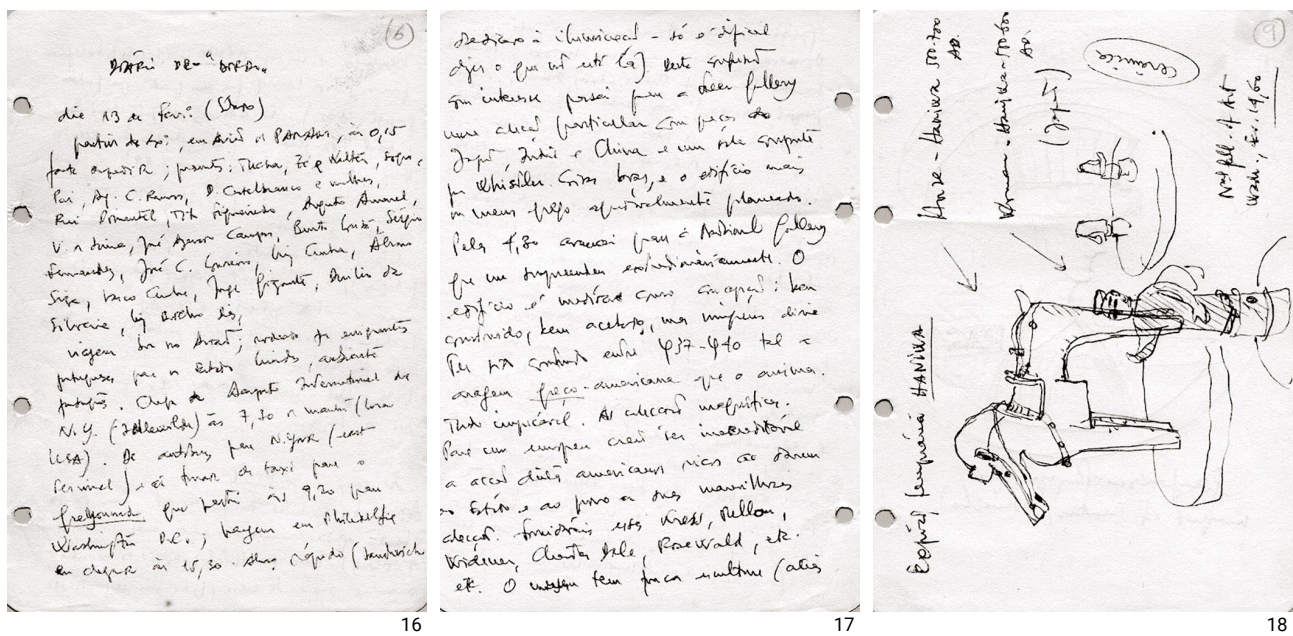
34 Távora, *Prólogo*, 20-21

35 See note 18.

36 On 27 March, in the Italian edition, which includes comments added by Távora during a reading of the *Diary* in the early 2000s, Távora explicitly mentions Carlos Ramos' role in obtaining the scholarship. Many other clues in the pages of the *Diary* testify that the primary objective of the scholarship is connected with the author's recently acquired academic position. Távora had defended his thesis (C.O.D.A.) at ESBAP in 1952, the year in which he had entered the role, following a competition, as an architect for the Municipality of Porto, with which he had already worked on a contract basis since 1948. From 1950 he had started to participate – unpaid – in the group of young assistants of Ramos, Director of ESBAP since 1952. In 1958 Távora had finally left his position at the City Hall to join ESPAB as Second Assistant to Chair No. 14. The Gulbenkian Foundation's call for applications was published on 19 March 1959 and indicated 'Secondary, Higher Technical Education: Sciences, Humanities and Arts' as the general theme. The application submitted by Távora on 27 April 1959, proposed as a work plan: "Study of teaching methods of architecture and urbanism in the following Universities and Institutes: Columbia University, Howard University, Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of Pennsylvania, Illinois Institute of Technology, Institute of Design". The duration indicated by the applicant is four months and the professional qualifications declared are: 'second assistant' at ESBAP, 'consultant-urban planner' at the City of Gaia (a role he has held since 1958), freelancer. Távora declares that he knows English and French; he adds that his wife will accompany him (which will not happen). The USA is the only destination envisaged in the application. On 17 September 1959, the Foundation informed him that the Board of Directors had decided to grant him a scholarship, for four months, to be started within the year. The amount granted is 9,000 scudi per month plus 4,500 scudi for travel. The documents relating to the call for applications - kept at AFIMS and at AFG – are published in Ana Mesquita, "O Melhor de Dois Mundos. A Viagem do arquitecto Távora aos EUA e Japão – Diário 1960." (Dissertação de Mestrado em Arquitectura Território e Memória, orient. José António Bandeirinha, Coimbra 2007), the first comprehensive and document-based study dedicated to the *Diary*.

submission for the professorship, and the trip is, in fact, an academic mission: to travel across the United States to get to know the teaching methods in vogue in the most renowned schools, especially the most up-to-date results of the innovations introduced into the American academic system by Walter Gropius and the other exiles of European Modernism. At the last moment, again through Ramos's intercession and in full coherence with the Director's interests, the mission financed by the Gulbenkian Foundation was joined by a stopover in Tokyo to attend the World Design Conference (Wo.De.Co.) scheduled for May 1960.

Gulbenkian's daily account of the journey clearly reveals and often painfully denounces the fatigue of an imposed and, above all, solitary undertaking, a circumstance not unimportant for an architect who mainly conceives the journey as a joyful collective experience, of teaching or sharing interests with friends-colleagues [Fig. 16, 17, 18].



The *Diary* has certain characteristics that need to be specified.

Firstly, unlike most *carnet de voyage* written by architects,<sup>37</sup> the *Diary* is not written to be read by anyone other than the author.<sup>38</sup> To a large extent, the text

37 Ana Mesquita, in her master's thesis, devotes several pages to a comparison between the *Diary* and other architects' travel books, particularly those of Le Corbusier.

38 The history of its publication bears witness to this. Some, early fragments were in fact published in the monograph published for Electa Mondadori by the author with Antonio Esposito (Esposito, Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera completa*). On that occasion, in the face of a generous availability for the reorganisation and reproduction of the archive, only a long courting led to the integral reading, proposed and conducted in first person by Távora himself. An annotated reading that forms the basis of the Italian edition. However, of these recordings – now preserved at AFIMS – only a few fragments were published then. It was only in 2012, thus seven years after Távora's passing, that the fundamental complete facsimile edition with transcriptions in Portuguese and English finally arrived, promoted by the Associação Casa da Arquitectura de Matosinhos, coordinated by Álvaro Siza and edited by Rita Marnoto, followed ten years later by the Italian edition. In the meantime, on the front of the excavation of Távora's intense diaristic activity and, more generally, of unpublished works, the first volumes of the fundamental and monumental work in progress by Manuel Mendes have seen the light of day. See, to date: Távora, *"Minha casa"*; Fernando Távora, *As Raízes e os Frutos palavra desenho obra 1937-2001*, Vol. 1 *Caminhos da arquitectura. Arquitectura e circunstância*, Tomo I, *"O Meu caso" Arquitectura, imperativo ético do ser 1937-1947*, coord. Manuel Mendes, (Porto: Fundação Instituto Arquitecto José Marques da Silva – U.Porto Press, 2021).

Fig. 16, 17, 18  
Fernando Távora, pages from the *Diário de "bordo"* (FIMS/AFT).

must be considered as a rough draft for the drafting of the *final report* due by invitation, which was in fact never delivered to the Gulbenkian Foundation.<sup>39</sup>

The text, however, does not end with the fulfilment of Ramos's mandate – a task that in itself offers infinite reasons for interest – but inevitably allows the personality and cultural identity of the extender to shine through at that date, in an alternation of not docile obedience and flashes of rebellion. The most clamorous of which is the 'flight' to Mexico, perhaps stimulated by some visits to US museums, which matured in Chicago on 7 April in a taxi driven by a Mexican driver, then patiently built up in the bureaucratic implications to finally arrive at the liberating "I'm going to Mexico!" on 20 April and the direct passage, a not insignificant circumstance, from Taliesin West to Mexico City, in the two following days. A variation to the travel schedule expressly forbidden by the scholarship regulations and which Távora experiences as an anti-American transgression.

The palimpsest structure of the *Diary* is, however, even richer and more complex.

Interwoven with the two tasks assigned to him as a young professor and the 'transgressions' he indulges in Mexico and beyond – are encounters, scheduled like the one with Wright, or accidental, that resonate profoundly – positively or negatively – with the cultural identity of Távora, who at that time is a 36-year-old 'young' professor but also an experienced professional architect.

The use of drawing, which is by no means constant throughout the journey, is certainly an obvious – but not infallible – plot to distinguish the tasks imposed by enthusiasms and personal choices.

The few drawings that intersperse the written page, which are otherwise rarely dedicated to architecture, are flanked by two cahiers (Notebook A and Notebook B), full of accurate and timely graphic surveys and annotations, dedicated to the architecture that Távora visits out of personal interest and not as part of the institutional travel programme. However, an exciting encounter does not always lead to a switch from writing to drawing – this is not the case, for instance, for the visits to the two Taliesin or the visit to the Pyramids – and sometimes, drawing is just a quick way to avoid written notes.

The fact remains that careful and scholarly design comes once the United States has left, in the encounters with archaeological Mexico, but especially with the Japanese temples and the Acropolis when the academic mission offers the opportunity to implement the journey into the Great Tradition that Távora had planned from a very young age.

Added to this is Távora's characteristic narrative mode, ironic and transversal. Given the nature of the text, it also lacks the thesis structure that sometimes characterises his academic writings.

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39 Távora received, to no avail, numerous reminders from the Foundation and Ramos to deliver the Final Report that was one of the mandatory conditions for obtaining the grant. For more information and a partial reproduction of the manuscript outline prepared and never developed – kept in the Távora Archive at AFIMS – see the study by Ana Mesquita and in particular, the chapter "Relatório Omisso e suas Consequências" (Mesquita da Costa, "O Melhor de Dois Mundos. A Viagem do arquitecto Távora aos EUA e Japão – Diário 1960.", 203-230).

Moreover, it is Távora himself who offers the definition of the *Diary* in the course of his oral re-reading: “a kind of journalistic diary, of a person who arrives in a country and notes everything down” (21 February).<sup>40</sup> The dry description must be combined with a broader conception of diaristic writing, a genre that saw him prolific from a very young age, expressed in a note of 22 April 1945:

A diary is like a history book, a critical account, and as critical, tendentious and one-sided, and this is because it admits the factor of choice, separation of facts. Now, to choose is to judge and therefore, to make a diary is to ‘tendentiously report’ on the facts that the writer considers most important... a diary is a truncated and tendentious account of the writer’s life.<sup>41</sup>

The two definitions are contradictory, but both are appropriate to the complex structure of the writing that accompanies the days of the Gulbenkian journey as a daily ritual, mainly in the evenings and often described as extremely taxing, the last effort before sleep.

On the one hand, the *Diary* is the instrument with which Távora notes down what he will need to write the Report required by the call for applications, thanks to which he obtained the scholarship. A ‘journalistic diary’ to which is added, supplementing it, a collection of materials of a different nature: typed visit programmes, business cards, ‘grey literature’ of different origins.<sup>42</sup> A private writing destined to remain so and functional to the mission entrusted to him as a professor at ESBAP by Director Carlos Ramos. However, the great daily effort would never turn into the Report due and solicited from him for months on his return, both by the Foundation’s Director, Maria José de Mendonça, and by Ramos himself. Távora’s resistance to the production of the due document, which goes as far as the paradox of a declared “little ease” in writing,<sup>43</sup> is probably determined precisely by the fact that the *Diary* is not only a “journalistic” account, but also a “truncated and tendentious” one, whose conclusions are, if not opposite, far removed from the mandate received.

Two themes innervate the *Diary*, clearly showing Távora’s non-adherence to the official mission assigned to him.

The first is the radical critique of the US cultural and economic development model.

Távora is well aware of the transgression and openly admits it in the spoken rereading, accompanying the admission with the irony that, even in the original text, invariably accompanies his rejection of the American model:

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<sup>40</sup> For an analysis of reading aloud and its significance in the history of the *Diary*, see the essay in the Italian edition: Raffaella Maddaluno, *Il Diario di Bordo: dalla testimonianza alla storia*. In Esposito, Leoni, Maddaluno, *Fernando Távora. Diario di bordo*, 20-37.

<sup>41</sup> Távora, *As Raízes e os Frutos*, 470.

<sup>42</sup> Fundamental to knowledge of this aspect of the *Diary* is of course the anastatic edition coordinated by Álvaro Siza and edited by Rita Marnoto.

<sup>43</sup> Ana Mesquita, as recalled, devotes a chapter of her discussion to the Report on the basis of a draft, forty A4 sheets, which she consulted, reproduced and transcribed (Mesquita da Costa, “O Melhor de Dois Mundos. A Viagem do arquitecto Távora aos EUA e Japão – Diário 1960”, 103 ff.) and recalls several documents relating to the exchanges on the subject between the default Távora and the Gulbenkian Foundation.

If they knew that there was a Portuguese who kept a diary about their country, who went around saying bad things about America... even if it's not true, I don't always say bad things about America, I also say good things; I also described something about a theatre in New York that had the largest corps de ballet: fifty dancers [Távora imitates dancers, editor's note] (12 April).

The second theme is the substantial disinterest in the destinies of post-CIAM modernism, from the American production of the European masters who emigrated there to the ideal continuation of the CIAM experience in the Wo.De.Co. in Tokyo. Disinterest, which often becomes radical criticism, from which not even the educational reform initiated in the USA by Gropius, whose knowledge is the main institutional reason for the trip, is saved.

The heteronymous structure of Távora's thought allows him to carry on a parallel chronicle and oriented narrative, often intertwining the many apparently purely practical considerations – think of the recurring theme of secretaries, “thousands of secretaries who are rarely interesting” (29 February) – consolidate, by repeating themselves, profound criticisms of the American model – in the cited case the formalism of always-mediated relations – while one of the most structured reflections on the architecture of the American days – the comparison by points between Mies and Wright (13 April) – is noted not in the pages of the Diary but on an enclosed business card. Narrative strategies – because it is difficult not to consider them as such if one knows the sophistication of writing of which Távora is capable – which lead to a consideration. The *Diary* certainly does not belong to the tradition of the *cahier d'architecture*. Here, as on the level of design, Távora does not adhere to a model he is familiar with, the LeCorbusierian account of travel as the construction of one's own personality and cultural identity, for example. Instead, he practises a multifaceted writing style, encompassing heterogeneous materials, mixing, as mentioned, chronicle and tendentious tale, he does not filter and does not distinguish between the cultural objectives of the journey and the data of his daily experience; he lets everything he encounters enter the scene, whether pleasing or unwelcome, accompanying each appearance with his evaluations. In other words, he writes exactly as he design, taking in the complexity that surrounds him, organising it without erasing it but orienting it according to cultural goals and responsibilities to which he feels he must respond.

Hence the difficult relationship with photography, a theme that recurs frequently in Távora's considerations before and after the experience of the Gulbenkian trip, the financing of which required, in addition to the report that was never delivered, a reportage in pictures. Távora, as he recalls, bought a Contina Matic for the occasion and took ‘four or five hundred photographs’, most of which he missed due to an incorrect camera setting (16 April).<sup>44</sup> ‘The great technique of the modern tourist,’ he notes on 25 May, ‘is not to see things, or rather to see them as a function of possible photographs and then look at them again at home through the same photographs. People want to see everything quickly so as not to see anything’.

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44 The photographs are now kept at Marques da Silva Foundation.

Beyond the technical error, about which there may be doubts, at least at the subconscious level, the radical criticism of photography will be clearly formulated as early as the text on the *Organisation of Space*, two years after the trip. Photography is harmful and illusory because it breaks “the continuity of space”, isolates “the most beautiful bits of the building, the most propitious time” and, of course, only documents the best building, “that of the architect with the most famous name, as if it were a prototype, when in fact it is only an exception”.<sup>45</sup>

A distrust of representation that extends, in reality, also to drawing, in which Távora is also a master. His conception of design, moreover, is centred on overcoming the domain of representation as the main ideational tool in favour of an architecture generated by a broader field of considerations and largely entrusted to reading and interpretation in situ, to building site practices, to the inclusion of the life of the finished work over time. Beautiful drawing is a danger for architecture; it can mislead in the interpretation of space; it must, therefore, remain above all an intellectual process and an instrument for the transmission of knowledge, not the skilful elaboration of a figure.<sup>46</sup>

The *Diary* does not betray this position.

Távora travelled across the United States, meeting figures such as Wright and Mies, almost without drawing architectural sketches in the strict sense. Only a beautiful perspective of the Robie House dated 16 April, the reasons for which are easy to reconstruct if one looks at two works in progress on the date of the trip, namely the Tennis Pavilion in the *Quinta da Conceição* and the *Cedar School* in Vila Nova de Gaia, in particular, for the latter, the loggia with a sloping roof. So much so that the drawing of 16 April, an anomalous presence in the pages of the *Diary*, could be interpreted as an occasional note for professional reasons.

In this deliberately ‘non-architectural’ journey, après Viktor Šklovskij,<sup>47</sup> we find, however, a reworking of certain key themes in Távora’s design method of the 1950s-1960s.

### **The Gulbenkian Journey, Disregards: Body and Metropolis**

One of the most prominent and explicit identities of the *Diary* is the profound critique that Távora brings to American culture. A critique not as a mere observer but structural to his project. As an institutional correspondent of Portugal that, at the date of the trip, has many excellent reasons to be pro-American, as a representative of a School of Architecture that looks to US teaching models, however, he not only does not adhere to the model but concludes that America is “magnificent Laboratory” “precisely and above all for knowing what to avoid at all costs” (13 April).

45 Távora, *Da Organização do Espaço*, 42-43.

46 In a 1993 Interview Távora goes so far as to describe Siza’s way of drawing as “very dangerous”, his extraordinary ability in this respect, declaring that he prefers “the drawing of those who have more difficulty” (Távora, *As raízes e os Frutos*, XXXV)

47 Viktor Borisovič Šklovskij, *Zoo, or Letters Not about Love* (Berlin: Helikon, 1923) [translated by Richard Schelder (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971)].



Two themes, in particular, can be traced back to the core of the design experiments Távora carried out in the years leading up to the trip, some of which are ongoing.

The first is the theme of the body as the primary instrument of a design method based on experiential knowledge.

"In the School of Porto, the founding instrument of the Modern act is the body and not the machine," writes Jorge Figueira in his 'critical map', a link to the 'humanist tradition' rather than the 'constructivist project', and if 'machine equals uprooting', 'body equals place'.<sup>48</sup>

Gulbenkian's journey unquestionably testifies to a centrality of the body as a vehicle for knowledge of places, and the theme substantiates the oft-repeated critique of the technocracy dominating the "American model." A centrality of the body that will return as a key element of the formalised design theory with the text on *The Organisation of Space*: "Isn't the presence of his body sufficient... for each man to become an element that organises space?"<sup>49</sup>



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The account of Távora's travelling body is, in the *Diary*, rich and varied.

First, Távora often insists on the incompatibility between a practice that is essential to him, walking, and the structure of the metropolis but, more generally, the technocentric economic development model he encounters in the USA.

On 27 February, in Philadelphia, after having walked the street between City Hall and the Museum of Art – sketching a glimpse of it in pen – chilled, he feels like 'the first person who walked that route' and notes, for the first time, that in these cities 'nobody knows how to walk'. The desolation and even irritation at cities where it is not possible to get around by walking returns on 29 February when he tries to walk to 346 Broadway – "I walk, I walk, the blocks passed me by, the streets passed me by, but 346 always and still very far away". Eventually, he resigned himself to a taxi. After a second walk later that day, he also bitterly notes the effects of the smog on his clothes [Fig. 19].

But the incompatibility between American culture and the culture of walking is also detected outside the metropolis, for example during the stay with his friend Cristiano Rendeiro, an 'Americanised' Portuguese who lives in the small town of

Fig. 19  
Fernando Távora, View of Philadelphia City Hall from Broad Street, 27 February 1960, from the *Diário de "bordo"* (FIMS/AFT).

48 Figueira, *A Escola do Porto. Um mapa crítico*, 35.

49 Távora, *Da Organização do Espaço*, 19.

Hamden following models of life that Távora studies with interest, trying to grasp their positivity, to see in that example the possible future of an 'Americanised' Portugal. An 'anthropological' investigation that comes to an ironic if not tragic end 'because it seems to me', writes Távora, "that, beyond representing a force that will crush us, this way of life is very fascinating". Realising that husband and wife, each have a car he observes that "no one knows how to walk and everything is very far away, and above all, everyone can have a car, or cars" (12-13 March); an observation that also captures the consumerist aspect of the prevalence of car culture.

On 6 April, he sees a drive-in restaurant for the first time and wryly observes "that if Americans could take their cars into the kitchen and go to mass or to the cobbler's or to the bathroom, they would certainly do so".

The theme returns to Chicago on 13 April in a day particularly full of reflections on architecture.

Távora is at the IIT, photographs Mies, plans to interview Hilberseimer but then, upon arriving at Crown Hall, catches sight of him and can't find the courage to "disturb the old man". Yet another avoidance of encountering the 'modernist tradition' transplanted to the USA. "Tired and confused" he sits in the basement and draws up, on Robert E. Curry's business card, a dichotomous comparison, by points, between Mies and Wright.<sup>50</sup> A "dilemma", the comparison between the two, about which the two students – a Chinese and an Indian – he had already met the previous day, with whom he now converses, do not seem to wonder.

The backdrop is dense: Crown Hall, a personal reflection on two opposing visions of architecture, the conversation with two non-Western students who, as he had observed on his 12 April visit, are unwittingly learning an architecture that will prove inadequate if practised in their home country, a Miesian academy fully integrated into American culture and functional to its inherent cultural imperialism.

50 On a business card of Robert E. Curry, Távora notes the following dichotomies:

Anonymity – Mies	Life, everything is known, etc., Wright
Staticity	Dynamism
Artificial materials	Natural materials
Mies sketch drawing	Wright ornament drawing
Minimum of colour	Polychromy
Mies – steel	Wright – stone – tomb
Cold, restraint, sobriety	Heat, emotionality
Anonymous	Individuality
Economics at its core	Economic Freedom
Unification of viewpoints, clarity	Variety of viewpoints, mystery
Play of natural elements for contrast.	Ditto but for sympathy
Painting and sculpture added	Integration of the arts
Intellectualism	Popularism
Similar elements	Different elements
Machine-made	Handmade
Get off the ground – estrangement from nature	Attachment to the terrain – merging with nature
Crystalline and mathematical and geometric forms	Organic and animal forms
Non-translation of inner space and minimum translation of function – symmetry	Outward expression of inner space and functions – asymmetry
Independence from these elements	Relation to customs, lifestyle, climate, local traditions, materials
Difficulties in growth	Opportunities for growth

See: Távora, *Diário de "Bordo"*, at the date.

Against this backdrop, the considerations regarding the Americans' idiosyncrasy for walking return, here articulated with a closely related theme, is also an integral part of a body-centred design conception: time.<sup>51</sup>

A subjective time, a bodily one, tends to elude external mechanical measurement as is already evident from the late awakening because 'the clock played the trick on me of delaying an hour'. An event, the delay concerning the rigid American punctuality, which often returns in the *Diary* (18 February), a constantly resurfacing tension between the personal, corporeal times of the traveller and the formal and mechanical times of which he is at the mercy.

Then the remembered architectural reflections and the disappointment of not finding any ideas in the conversation with the two students, finally the resulting outburst. Nobody really walks, in the USA, and "there are no benches", nobody stops to laze around and, therefore, nobody stops to think. That is why there is a lack of ideas. "*Lazing around, chatting, causer* and things like that are not known here".

Távora reinforces his defence of idleness, of pause, of suspension from action, of the cultivation of the useless as a creative process by quoting a line from *Liberdade* by his beloved See: "Oh what a pleasure / Not fulfilling a duty".<sup>52</sup>

To lose the willingness to pause, to suspend, to purposeful action, always subservient to the economy, is to lose "treasure". We find ourselves at the heart of the radical critique he brings to the American model, and after asking himself whether "it is not possible to create a middle way between this kind of slavery and ours?", he makes it clear that the Portuguese "slavery" is not the cultural model – however superior – but the objective poverty of the country. America offers cars, housing, jobs, services, social equality and "supposed racial equality", it offers plenty of money, but the price one pays in exchange for these advantages is very high: physical and mental illness, juvenile delinquency, racial conflicts, subjugation to labour, a problematic urban life, slums. On top of that, subservience to "extraordinary potentates": communication, real estate, large-scale distribution and entrepreneurship command the country's life. The only faith is money in a country where "you spend to earn". Távora's vision is lucid and, in some passages, prophetic. If this country without faith other than in money were to be opposed by "a country with a Faith", America would not resist.

As we can see, the centrality of the body, the respect for its times and its measures, in addition to providing a foundation for the architectural project, profiles a vision that we could define as social ecology, a discipline that, moreover, begins to emerge in chronological correspondence with the *Diary*.<sup>53</sup>

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51 "In architecture, both in the long and the short term, time plays a fundamental role, not only as a parameter of observation, but also as a dimension proper to the work; of course, every building, just like a painting or a sculpture, has a life, but in its case, it is made more complex because the performance of specific practical functions can force its actualisation, or its abandonment, facts that alter its nature as an organised space". (Távora, *Da Organização do Espaço*, 87)

52 See note 17.

53 The first edition of *Silent Spring*, a work by Rachel Carson that initiated the social ecology strand, was published in 1962 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company).

Closely connected to walking as a form of knowledge and design process is the second theme, namely the encounter with the American and, more generally, non-European metropolis.

Távora often insisted on the “rural nobility” character of his family of origin and the importance of this matrix.<sup>54</sup> A matrix that, in his youth, resulted in an explicit hostility to the big city.<sup>55</sup>

Still in 1956, Távora, with a certain naiveté, notes in a diary page an explicit “I hate the metropolis” and dreams of living in the family home in the country, in Covilhã, travelling to Paris, New York, Lisbon or Rio “from time to time” to experience “the dirty, tempting world of the metropolis”. The note is the same, however, in which he notes that Carlos Ramos has promised him a professorship at the School and the 1960 trip to the USA, as seen, is part of the programme.<sup>56</sup>

There is no doubt that Gulbenkian’s trip to the United States represents a powerful homoeopathic cure for the young Távora’s anti-metropolitan stance and perhaps more generally for the “nostalgia for harmony” that Jorge Figueira emphasised as the character of his work.<sup>57</sup> A nostalgia that at the date of the journey also feeds on the city, but a city of small dimensions, familiar and controllable through historical and physical knowledge, the result of crossings, of reflections from life. A city to which, in 1960, Távora had already dedicated an important piece of writing: *About Porto and its space*.<sup>58</sup> A small, structured city, “a sculpture in permanent movement”, “taking the most varied forms” in a “magnificent or banal” synthesis, a city that can only be assessed in one way, “walking through it, living it, walking along its streets, descending its slopes, climbing to its highest points, inhabiting its houses, feeling it as a living organism that does not stop, that changes day after day”. A specific city, with specific characteristics and which, precisely because of its specificity, can be, “beyond small spaces such as streets, squares or gardens, an urban space structured according to the most modern urban planning concepts”.

In the text on Porto’s space, the term of comparison, to which he does not conform, is Hausmann’s Paris, let’s say the whole urban planning tradition that unravels from that episode. But, having arrived in the USA, Távora does not encounter the great European cities or even the metropolitan imagery of the historical avant-gardes; he encounters the metropolis as a direct translation of the capitalist economy, which appears to him as “a chaos in which one gets lost”,<sup>59</sup> the realm of discontinuity and disorder, the themes that he will bring to

54 Fernando Távora sobre o Inquérito à Arquitectura Popular em Portugal, entrevista por João Leal in: Távora, “Minha Casa”, 3.

55 “Madrid, Barcelona, Marseilles were the cities where I felt most, and with increasing gravity, a series of circumstances and determining factors that, against all supposition, make urban life almost unbearable”. (Távora, “Minha Casa”, *Viagem pela Europa*, 17, note of 27 September 1947).

56 Note of 20-21 April 1956 in: Távora, *As Raízes e os Frutos*, 36-39.

57 Figueira, *A Escola do Porto. Um mapa crítico*, 36-37.

58 Fernando Távora, *Do porto e do seu espaço*, “Comércio do Porto”, 26 Janeiro 1954.

59 “For life is at the start a chaos in which one is lost. The individual suspects this, but he is frightened at finding himself face to face with this terrible reality and tries to cover it over with a curtain of fantasy, where everything is clear. (Ortega y Gasset, *Revolt of Masses*, 156-157).

the centre of the project in theoretical form in the text on *The Organisation of Space*. Moreover, beyond Távora's cultural matrices, it should not be forgotten that his is an institutional mission aimed at probing models of teaching but also at Portugal's development at a time when the country is transitioning from a fundamentally agricultural model to an industrial one.

The comparison between the US metropolis and European cities, which is part of the test of continuity between European and US culture, is a recurring theme in the *Diary*, almost always expressed negatively.

Washington, apart from the White House area, is chaos, writes Távora. However, the comparison between the monumental area and its French references is also ruthless, a 'Greek style' but hypertrophic. Lacking, above all, is continuity over time: "It is as if everything had been bombed and the city had been rebuilt in a state of emergency, preserving only a few old buildings. It is worth visiting this city to understand how Paris is a work of art... It is chaos taking shape".

However, the problem of the failed cultural relay between Europe and the US stems from something other than architectural incapacity. It is a political problem: the use of an architectural model developed in a monarchy to represent "a federation that is a champion of democracy".

The city lacks "civic sense" and shows a gap between places of government and places of citizenship.

He writes on 28 February that Philadelphia is closer to the idea of an 'American city', perhaps because of the skyscrapers, perhaps because even "old" buildings have "more symbolic value for Americans than interest for an architect". Even here, however, there is no shortage of chaos and filth.

But the real encounter with the American metropolis, free from comparison with European models, takes place, inevitably, in New York, where Távora arrives on Sunday, 28 February, "practically at night" and, surprisingly enough, observing without prejudice, recognises in the chaos if not values at least a new form of collective life:

... no light is fixed; everything glitters as on a hot summer night full of fireflies (this is an incredibly new concept, that of movement, of a society in permanent motion - movement in all scales of space and time) ... I recognise that for the first time, I feel the life of a city in this place. Lots of people, lots of light, lots of languages, open shops, lots of souvenirs for sale.

Távora immediately lowers the tone of his metropolitan lyricism by resorting, as he often does, to irony: "something like Santa Catarina", referring to a shopping street in Porto.

It is difficult, however, not to relate the vision of this metropolis in perpetual movement at all scales of space and time with the key idea of the *Organisation of Space* and with the passage that that text makes between the idea of a harmonious space, to be recomposed in its fullness and unity, and the idea of a

relational space that derives from a constantly renewed design commitment to the organisation of chaos.

It is not, however, a sudden enlightenment, although on reading the pages of the Diary it certainly comes as a surprise.

The cultural matrices of Tàvora are multiple and complex, and in part, they are still to be excavated. Certainly, at that date, a very present author is Ortega y Gasset who in his *The Rebellion of the Masses* writes:

... the urbe or polis was born from a void: the forum, the agora; and everything else is a pretext to guarantee this void, to delimit its perimeter. The polis is not originally an aggregate of houses, but a place of civil gathering, a circumscribed space for public functions... new category of space, much more original than Einstein's space.<sup>60</sup>

Ortega y Gasset distinguishes the new space, a vacuum in which relations take place, from the space of rural man, whose existence 'preserves the unconscious warmth in which the plant lives. in his *Meditations on Quixote*, he writes that

... things connected in a relationship form a structure. What would a thing considered in isolation be like? Poor, sterile, confused. One would say that there is in each thing a certain secret potentiality to be many other things, a potentiality that is released and expands when another or others enter into relation with it. You would say that each thing is fertilised by the others; you would say that they desire each other; like males and females; you would say that they love each other or that they aspire to unite, to join together in societies, in organisms, in buildings, in worlds', 'one thing cannot be determined except in relation to others.'<sup>61</sup>

The sense of a thing, Ortega writes, is the supreme form of its coexistence with others, "the mystical shadow that the rest of the universe spreads" over it. This gives rise to a duality, a perennial conflict, between the "materiality" of things, on the one hand, "what constitutes them before and in spite of all interpretation" and, on the other hand, the "sense" of things "what they are when interpreted."

This is what we call realism: bringing things to a certain distance, putting them in a light, slanting them so that the side that slopes towards pure materiality is accentuated. Myth is always the starting point of all poetry, including realist poetry. Only in the latter we accompany the myth in its descent, in its fall. The theme of realist poetry is the crumbling of poetry. I do not believe that reality can enter art in any other way than by making its own inertia and desolation an active and combative element.<sup>62</sup>

Ortega's positions describe very well the experiments, including design experiments, that Tàvora completed or had in progress at the time of the Gulbenkian trip, and the perennially unstable balance between materiality and interpretation

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60 Ortega y Gasset, *Revolt of Masses*, 150 ff.

61 Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Quixote*, 87 ff.

62 Ortega y Gasset, *Revolt of Masses*, 135 ff.

well defines the theme of the Anonymous that is at the centre of this research as well as the idea of a realism that does not forget myth.

Certainly the impact with New York, in fact the entire Gulbenkian journey and the confrontation with the great metropolises of the United States and elsewhere, the exercise of reading an “organised space” foreign to him, devoid of recognisable values, is an important step in the redefinition of the project’s task. His field of action is redefined and is no longer a cutout in which to exercise form autonomously, but the chaos to which the whole world falls prey, the discontinuity of space with respect to which form becomes an instrument of interpretation and recomposition, not replacement.<sup>63</sup>

### **The Gulbenkian Journey: Reflections**

On 6 February 1950, Távora wrote in an unpublished note that he wanted to know

... the artistic manifestations connected to tradition through a journey that would pass through Egypt (Cairo), Greece (Athens), Italy (Rome) and France, a journey that would allow me to determine the constants, the connections between the Pyramids, the Parthenon, the Pantheon and St. Peter’s, Versailles and the Eiffel Tower. The determination of this constant classicism seems indispensable to my spirit as critical as it is in need of certainty.<sup>64</sup>

“There is only one way to dominate the past, Kingdom of Things Past: to inject our blood into the empty veins of the dead. It is precisely this that the reactionary cannot do: treat the past as a way of life”.<sup>65</sup> The idea, which we find in the pages of Ortega y Gasset, of “using” the “classic” for our salvation, without regard – that is, disregarding its classicism, transporting it down to us, bringing it up to date, describes very well the task that Távora has given himself, from a very young age, regarding the “necessary” knowledge of the Great Tradition to which he feels he belongs even if, to define the theme of constants, his references are also others, and among the most cited *The Decline of the West* by Oswald Spengler.<sup>66</sup> A knowledge of “constant classicism” that is, throughout his life, the prime mover of his travelling.

By the time of the Gulbenkian journey, Távora, as we have seen, had already extended the youthful task of taking monumental history as a non-figurative but methodological model, as a lesson of constants and not as a history of forms, by including Portuguese popular architecture among the references. This research is certainly not disconnected or alternative to the study of the Great Tradition for two distinct reasons. Firstly, because of the absolute exemplary value he

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63 These are key themes of the text on *The Organisation of Space*. See in particular Távora, *Da Organização do Espaço*, 13 ff.

64 Manuel Mendes, “Ah, che ansia umana di essere il fiume o la riva!” in Esposito, Leoni, Fernando Távora. *Opera completa*, 355-356.

65 Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Quixote*, 49.

66 Távora often cites Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* (1918) and in a 1996 interview states that the book had offered him, for the first time, an idea of “evolutionary history”, a broad vision, “which evidently still exists today, which is interesting - and which is exactly what I introduce into these stories I tell, when I practice History [of Architecture].” (*Fernando Távora sobre o Inquérito*, 11).

attributes to the lesson of popular architecture. Secondly, because an integral part of the research on popular architecture is the comparison between it and the best results of the modernist season, Wright and Le Corbusier in particular. Not a juxtaposition but an action of integration and overcoming, as we have seen. Because, in Távora's vision, it is not a matter of creating a contraposition between tradition and modernity but of giving continuity to two forms of modernity: the permanent modernity of popular architecture and the modernity of the innovations, linguistic and spatial, of "modernism". Innovations, these that fully belong to the Great Monumental Tradition, which is the ultimate outcome of the cultural cycle of Greece, Rome, and Europe of which he also feels part.

At the time of the Gulbenkian trip, Távora had also long since begun his journey into the Great Tradition, in the sense now mentioned, through his travels in Europe. In 1947, while travelling in Italy, he had already clearly outlined his positions concerning the meaning of the monument by "criticising" St. Peter's, which "strikes you as colossal, luxurious' but is "a church where you don't feel like praying", and instead enthusing, for the first and not the last time, about visiting Venice, a city that certainly has monuments, 'but is a city'.<sup>67</sup>

The 1960 trip, however, allowed him to add some milestones: Mexican archaeology, Japanese temples and Katsura, the Pyramids, the Acropolis.

One consideration, or rather a general attitude, unites these visits.

The pages of the *Diary* are punctuated with criticism of the US idea of the museum. US museums are "irritating" because they only testify to the wealth of those who have been able to acquire the exhibits, a culture acquired, not produced. Museums are therefore "detached from society", "something like a Rembrandt in a rich butcher's house". They do not have the 'naturalness' of French or Italian museums, their idea of preserving things of their own. Still, above all, there is no continuity between what can be admired in US museums and the places of everyday life. We are once again at the centre of Távora's reflections on design: the continuous space that is the translation of a system of relations in constant adjustment, spatial relations and, at the same time, economic, social, and political relations.

Visits to Mexican archaeological sites, traditional Japanese architecture, the Pyramids and the Acropolis are all marked by a verification, even before the strictly architectural values, of "continuity" in the sense now mentioned. The monuments celebrated in the Great History only have value if read as integrated and integral to the civilisation that produced them since even they do not retain their value if isolated or besieged by incongruous settlements or uses.

In *The organisation of space*, he will develop in theoretical form the idea of a monument that goes beyond "the scope of this or that more or less erudite building, of more or less known history, to encompass much broader areas and more common buildings".<sup>68</sup>

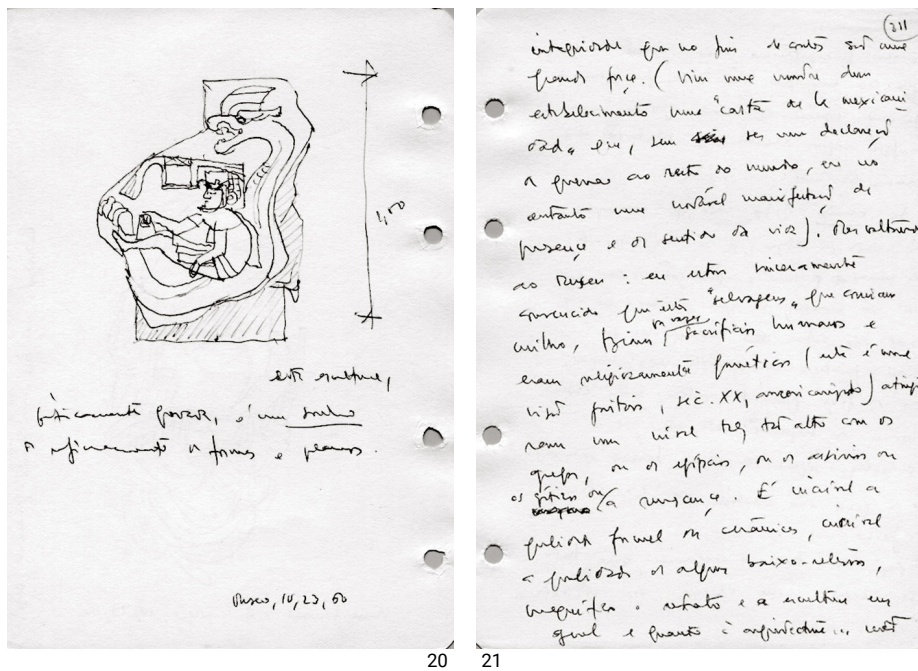
67 Távora, "Minha Casa", *Viagem pela Europa*, 38-39. Concerning the relationship between these journeys and Távora's project research, see Liverani, *Context and Project. Italian Influences on Fernando Távora's Architecture*.

68 Távora, *Da Organização do Espaço*, 58



## The Gulbenkian Journey, Reflections: Mexico

The week in Mexico (22-29 April) is all about this political conception of the “monument”. It is, as mentioned, a transgression of the institutional programme envisaged by the fellowship, a real headlong rush dictated by impatience with American life and culture. “I am beginning to tire of North America, and I feel the need to seek out people of my race,” he notes lapidary on 7 April, and his enthusiastic praise of Mexico, once reached, is all played out in opposition to the US model [Fig. 20, 21].



It is with this spirit that Távora enters the National Museum, “so rich”, with “an air so natural that it enchants”, but above all, there is, over the entire span of time witnessed by the works on display, the permanence of an “essence”, of an identity with respect to which changes of language or religion are “details”. Again, it is an element of contrast and criticism to the USA’s “amorphous country *par excellence*, where everyone has blood from twenty origins - and in the end it is as if they had blood from nowhere defined”. On the other hand, Mexico is a place of “coherence” and “integrity”, evidence of a civilisation equal to that of “the Greeks, or the Egyptians, or the Assyrians, or the Goths, or the Renaissance.” Távora is seized by an aesthetic exaltation such as, in the US weeks, had only happened to him in Taliesin East, “a kind of madness that led me to make drawings and which, above all, made me very tired”. “Everything is understandable”, “everything is integrated in a climate that has changed but is in the process of becoming”.

The visit to Teotihuacan (26 April), “which alone is worth the trip”, shows how, in Mexico, Távora seeks not so much a lesson in architecture – he does not, in fact, devote a sketchbook to the experience as he does to the Japanese temples or the Acropolis<sup>69</sup> – but the model of an “integrated” traditional culture that

Fig. 20, 21

Fernando Távora, notes and sketch of a Maya Sculpture with annotation: ‘this sculpture, carved in the Gothic manner, is a dream of refined forms and planes’, 23 April 1960, from the *Diário de “bordo”* (© Fundação Marques da Silva, Arquivo Fernando Távora).

69 Távora returned to Mexico at the end of 1990.

has been able to develop in continuity over time. Arriving at the site while also grasping the relationships between architecture and the ground – one of his great design themes – he strives above all to imagine the place “in the golden age”, “the buildings ordered in their polychromy and abundance, animated by the crowd in great ceremonial rites” and, on the truck for the return journey, he searches for the spirit of the culture that produced that place

... what people! Aztecs, Toltecs, Chichimecs, Maias and who knows what else! What an enchanting journey; I was there imagining them naked, feathers on their heads, performing the great rites of the sun or fire or making some human sacrifice (in addition to people, there were chickens, children, loaves, baskets, etc., all incredibly mixed up)’. Again, the comparison with the United States was given in conversation. “You know, we are a bit crazy,” a fellow traveller tells him, “comparing us with the Americans”

and Távora then launches into a “eulogy of madness compared with North American passivity”.

And if my Spanish had been better, I would have ventured a translation of Pessoa: “Without madness what is man, if not a healthy beast, a deferred corpse that procreates?”<sup>70</sup> – but my Spanish is poor and the man was quite clueless (but he felt things).

### **The Gulbenkian Journey, Reflections: Pyramids**

The visit to the Pyramids (5-8 June) is a disappointment precisely in relation to the theme of continuity.

On the one hand, Távora is admired by the geographical dimension of the archaeological complexes outside Cairo when (6 June) he reaches the sites of Abuigareb and Djoser on horseback – a “very demanding” but ideal journey to grasp the aspects that interest him. Sand (the material), sun (the climate) and distance (the geography) allow him to grasp the large-scale geographical dimension of the relationship between building and landscape – the “valley (and delta) – desert (and mountain) dualism”.

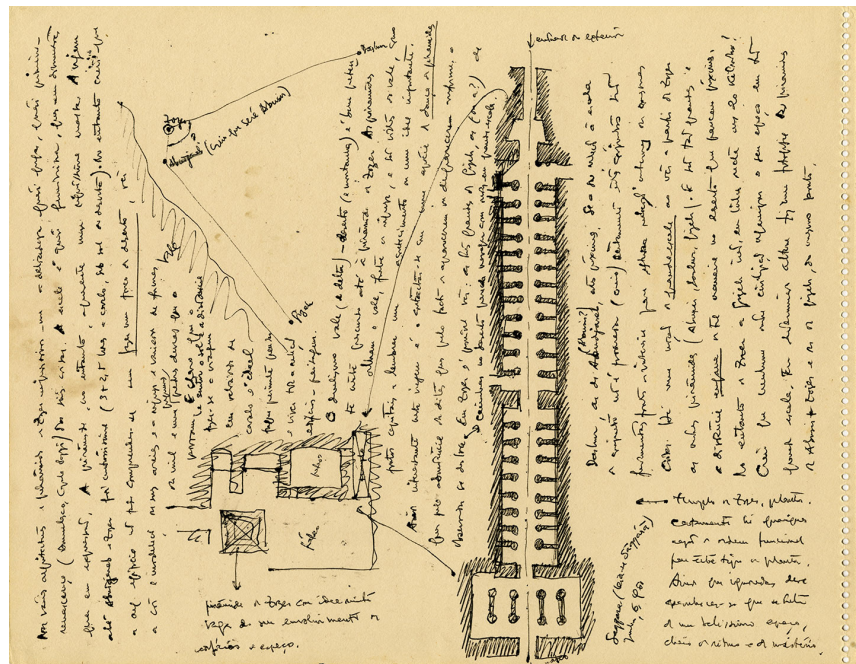
I don’t think any other civilisation has organised its space on such a grand scale ... The pyramids look down on the valley, the source of wealth, and are visible from the valley as capital points to commemorate an important event or idea.

This is the recognition of a central theme in Távora’s project and, according to the reading of space that would be theorised two years later in the text on *The Organisation of Space*, this geographical structure is captured not statically but dynamically: the pyramids “dance” appearing and disappearing as the traveller proceeds through the desert dunes.

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70 “Sem a locura que è o homem / Mais que a besta sadia / Cadávr adiado que procria?” Pessoa, *Mensagem*, I.III.5.

But the encounter with the pyramid of Cheops in the previous days had been a disappointment “because contemporary civilisation has come too close”. The pyramids, he realises, usually shown as isolated in the desert, are almost part of the city. “A horrible thing,” he comments again in the voice-reading, “camels, donkeys and horses”, “importunate and sticky Arabs sticking to people”, “buses, houses, restaurants”. “The pyramids were built for the solitude and grandeur of the desert and not for this park-like dimension that partly surrounds them”. Yet another consideration from the *Diary* that testifies to how



Yet another consideration from the *Diary* that testifies to how Távora senses the possible cultural damage associated with mass tourism. Perhaps with subtle irony, perhaps unconsciously or perhaps by chance, finding himself in the presence of a building that, for him represents one of the great models of the relationship between architecture and the land, he does not draw it but dedicates a sheet of the Notebooks (B, no. 7) to a group of camels, capturing their way of crouching on the ground [Fig. 22].

### The Gulbenkian Journey, Reflections: Japan

If the stopovers in Mexico and Cairo only hesitate a few drawings devoted to architecture in the strict sense, the visits to traditional Japanese architecture and the Acropolis generate most of the pages of the two larger sketchbooks that Távora brings back from the Gulbenkian trip, the first (*Notebook A*) devoted to Japan and Thailand, the second (*Notebook B*) to Baalbek and Athens.

In the Notebooks, the relationship between drawing and writing is reversed, with the former prevailing over the latter, but it does not disappear and, despite its skilful use, drawing remains an “intellectual” tool and a “transmission of knowledge”, without indulging in calligraphy or figures as an end in themselves. An extensive accompanying text justifies each graphic sign and explains the reasons for it. As Távora states in an interview, “The drawings we make while travelling are emergency drawings”; we cannot draw everything and “drawing has a quality regardless of value”.<sup>71</sup>

Thanks to the two Notebooks, it is possible to observe first-hand how the visits to traditional Japanese architecture and the Acropolis are acts of recognition of architectural themes already firmly structured in Távora’s design activity, as

Fig. 22  
Fernando Távora, Saqqara, 6 June 1960, from the *Diário do “bordo”* (FIMS/AFT).

71 Távora, *As Raízes e os Frutos*, XLIV (from a 2002 interview).

demonstrated by the parallel analysis of some projects from the 1950s-60s, thus preceding or contemporary with the Gulbenkian trip.

The *Vila da Feira Market* (1954-1959) shows how advanced the research on architecture as an organised and relational space that Távora found, especially during his visit to Japanese temples, was in practice well before theory.

Távora started the design of the Market in September 1954, implementing the provisions of the 1950-1951 Urbanisation Plan, approved in 1953. The Plan placed the structure near the Castle of Santa Maria da Feira to create an element of urban prominence in relation to the Castle itself and the park surrounding it.<sup>72</sup> The final design was in 1958 and the realisation in 1959, the year in which Távora presented the work at the CIAM in Otterlo.<sup>73</sup>

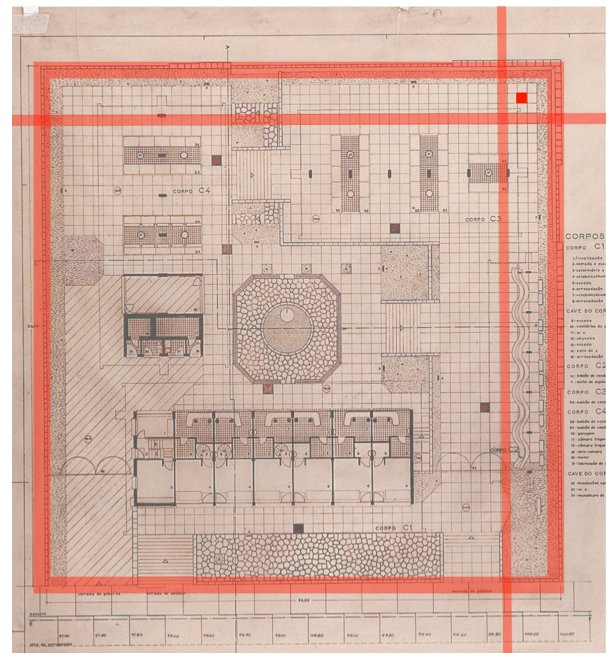
In the same report, written ex-post, the project is described in the following words:

A 50x50 metre square to set up a market. A square module, measuring 1x1 metre, commands the composition and introduces its geometry. Several bodies, with a protective sense, are distributed to form a patio. Not only a place for the exchange of things but also of ideas, an invitation for people to meet.

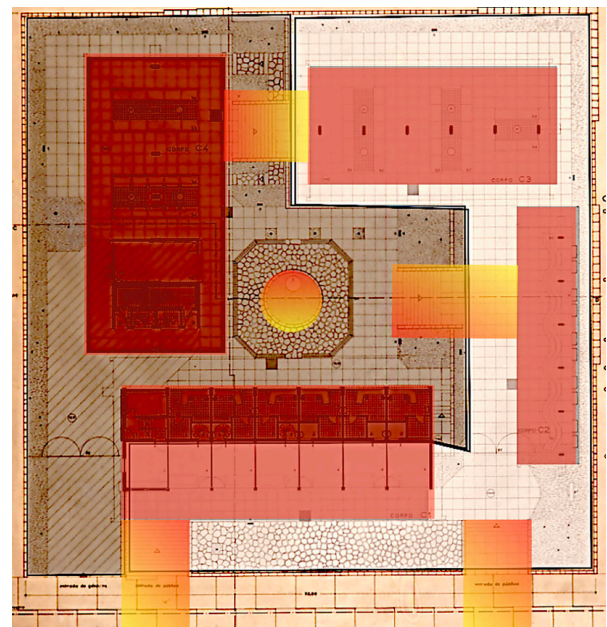
The idea of the four autonomous pavilions and their location on two platforms at different heights is already in the first memory, but in the first version drawn, Távora imagines the pavilions surrounded by greenery and, in the centre of the complex, "a small lake".

In the final design, the four pavilions – three equal in size and a smaller one intended for the flower trade – are placed within the complex's square basement, chasing each other in a dynamic centrifugal succession around a focus, off-centre with respect to the position of the pavilions and also with respect to the square basement. In the built version, the focus is marked by a fountain inscribed in a continuous concrete seat covered with azulejos to form a square with rounded corners.

An emptiness, an invitation to a possible stop in the larger space left free between the pavilions [Fig. 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28].



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72 Susana Milão, *Mercado de Feira de Távora: o centro (herma e core)*. *Une telle symétrie ne convient pas à la solitude*, In Távora, "Minha casa", 214-231.

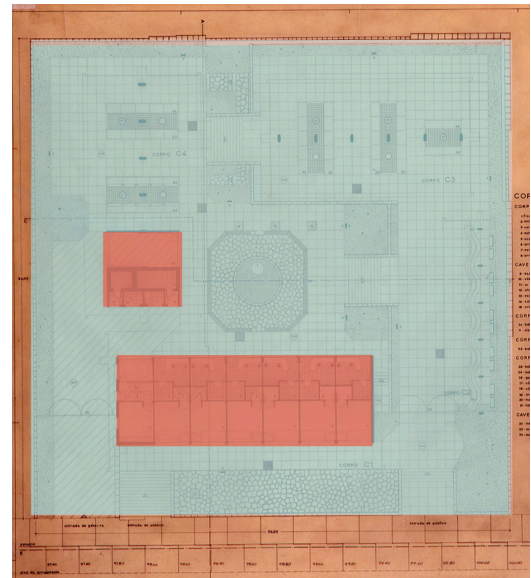
73 Cfr. Oscar Newman, *CIAM '59 in Otterlo* (Stuttgart: Karl Krämer Verlag, 1961): 133-137.

Fig. 23, 24  
Fernando Távora, Vila da Feira Market, general plan (FIMS/AFT, graphics by the author).





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The subtle complexity of the ensemble, evidently the result of a reflection on the crossings and stops that the Market can offer, is further complicated by a play of altimetry. The base on which the Market stands is detached from the street level, showing a granite wall on the outside that contributes to the monumental tone<sup>74</sup> sought by Távora for this new architecture on an urban scale and intended for collective use. A monumental character clearly in dialogue with the historic city and the Castle in particular. The elevated platform is divided into two levels, and four staircases connect, the first two – on the street front – the street level with the higher platform – which houses the smaller pavilion and one of the larger ones – while the other two, inside the Market, connect the high platform to the low one, placing the pavilion facing the street straddling the two platforms.

The overall sense of a series of variants governed by the one-metre by one-metre mesh is accentuated by the sales equipment in the open pavilions: long concrete floors covered with slate for sales and cylindrical wash basins, elements with a rich materialisation but, in their geometry, with a neo-plastic flavour<sup>75</sup> [Fig. 29, 30].

The abstract compositional logic that governs the ground organisation described above – with its coexistence of modularity and variation of the elements distributed within the mesh – changes radically if we raise our gaze to the elevated elements, which are distinctly plastic. The primary structure of the canopies that define the pavilion space by their projection on the ground is, in fact, composed of imposing columns with a rounded rectangular section that support symmetrical cantilevered beams to form a wing-like structure, all made of bush-hammered reinforced concrete. The soffit between the exposed beams

74 On this topic, see Carlos Machado's extensive and learned analysis of the Market (Carlos Machado, "The Market", in *Reclaiming the Use of Fernando Távora's Municipal Market of Santa Maria da Feira*, edited by Vincenzo Riso (Braga: Universidade do Minho. Laboratório de Paisagens, Património e Território – Lab2PT, 2018): 23-56.

75 For a detailed analysis of materials and construction systems, see: Isabel Valente, "Structural analysis", in: Riso, *Reclaiming the Use of Fernando Távora's*: 79-91.

Fig. 25

Fernando Távora, Nijo Palace, Kyoto, 24 May 1960, from the *Diário de "bordo"* (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 26

Fernando Távora, Tofukuji Garden, Kyoto, 26 May 1960, from the *Diário de "bordo"* (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 27, 28

Fernando Távora, Vila da Feira Market, general plan (FIMS/AFT, graphics by the author).

Fig. 29

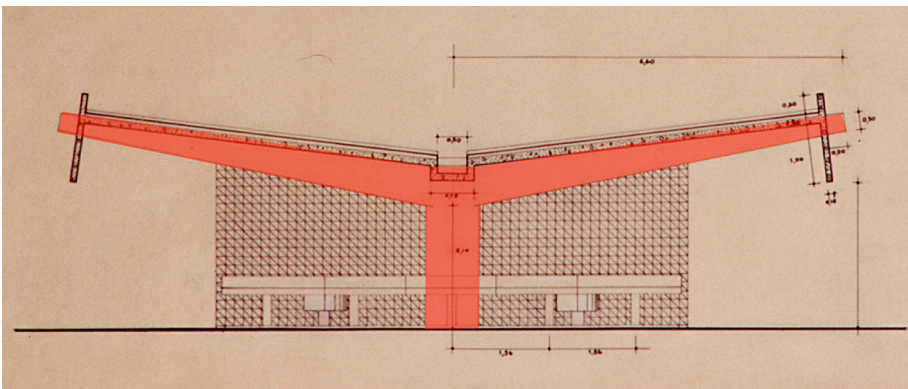
Fernando Távora, Vila da Feira Market (photo by the author).

Fig. 30

Fernando Távora, Vila da Feira Market, general plan (FIMS/AFT, graphics by the author).



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is plastered and painted red. This structure determines the most immediately evident architectural identity of the Market, repeating itself in the various pavilions but articulating itself in different variants, sometimes in purity – albeit with dimensional differences – sometimes with infills, these sometimes covered with azulejos, in other cases, as in the street front, glazed [Fig. 31, 32].

The fluid space of the Marketplace is thus generated in the relationship between the organisation of the ground – the materialisation of potential different crossings of the site also in relation to the city – and the clear, monumental architectural definition of an element added to the urban structure.

The Portuguese genealogy of the innovative structure conceived by Távora has been identified by several observers in various references, among which the Ovar Market built by Januário Godinho in 1948 stands out.<sup>76</sup>

Various biographical and cultural ties unite Távora to Godinho, who was born in 1910, but above all, about the Market project, an interest in the work of Wright,

76 “But also the Market in Ovar (Januário Godinho, 1948), as a precedent, not only in the way of organising the same programme, as an ‘open’ market around an ‘interior’ free space, but also having chosen the ‘butterfly wing’ roof, a clear influence by Le Corbusier – see the houses Errazuris (1930), or Jaoul 49 (1937) – which came to Portugal partially filtered by the dissemination of the Brazilian modern architecture”. Carlos Machado, *The Market*, in Riso, *Reclaiming the Use of Fernando*, 23-55. See also: André Tavares, *Duas Obras de Januário Godinho em Ovar* (Porto: Dafne Editora 2012); Fátima Sales, “Januário Godinho: a arquitectura como síntese. Diálogo entre tradição e modernidade”, *Revista Arquitectura Lusíada*, no. 6 (2014), 33-50; Milão, “Mercado da Feira de Távora: o centro (herma e core), Mercado da Feira de Távora: o centro (herma e core). Une telle symétrie ne convient pas à la solitude”.

Fig. 31  
Fernando Távora, Vila da Feira Market (photo by the author).

Fig. 32  
Fernando Távora, Vila da Feira Market, section of canopies (FIMS/AFT, graphics by the author).

an interest in but not a militant adherence to the innovations of European modernism, “a Husserlian perspective” that opposes the “Cartesian concept of abstract space” in favour of a space that is “no longer ‘geometric’ but existential” for which “the work of architecture is a construction that is born from this experience”.<sup>77</sup>

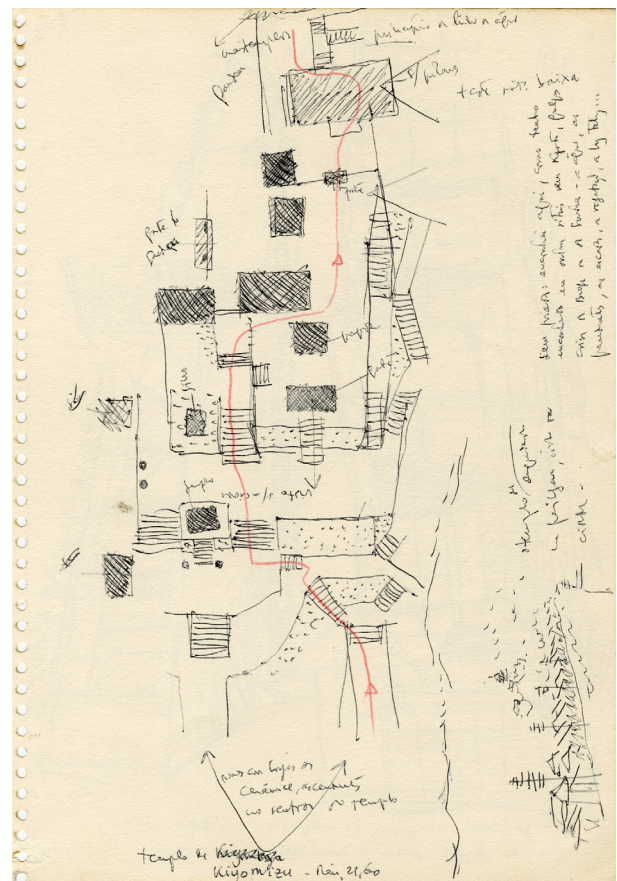
The visit to traditional Japanese architecture, which Távora was already familiar with from books,<sup>78</sup> is the occasion for a series of acts of recognition relating to the central themes of the project.

First of all, we might say the conception of an architectural element as the primary objective and centre of design action is overcome in favour of a geographical vision of the project in which the individual architectures are relevant as components of a relational system that encompasses every element, artificial and natural, solid or aerial.

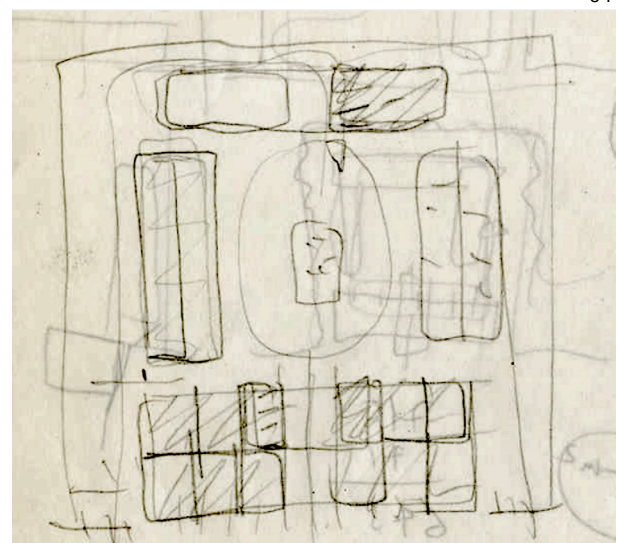
On 21 May, visiting the Kiyomizu Temple, Távora notes: “What interests me about a Japanese temple at the moment is not so much the building itself but the layout of the buildings in relation to each other and to the terrain – flat or sloping” [Fig. 33, 34].

Visits are, in fact, always approached with plans of the area, presumably found in guidebooks or publications. Távora mentions this in his writing, and the drawings prove it beyond doubt. The view is, first of all, zenithal and planimetric, aimed at capturing the overall structure of the place, then also revealed in its elevations and orographic variations. The place, described and represented, naturally also includes the architectural structures in a system of relationships.

Even when compared to the innovative Ovar Market, the Vila da Feira Market appears to be a radical work, in which the single architectural element, the concrete canopy, is repeated with a seriality that depletes its already skeletal, anonymous form, substantially referable to a structural diagram. This simple and impersonal element is then subjected to a constant exercise of variation, subjugated, so to speak, to the true centre of the design commitment, that is, the materialisation of a system of relations between spaces, or rather places, with different characters. A system of crossing and stopping opportunities,



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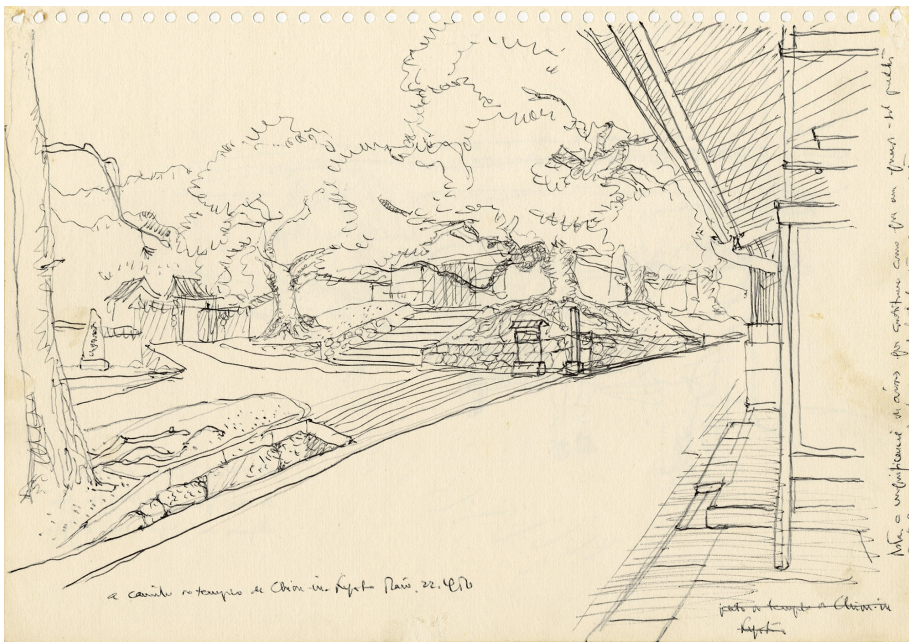
Fig. 33  
Fernando Távora, Kiyomizu Temple, 21 May 1960, from the *Diário de "bordo"* (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 34  
Fernando Távora, Preliminary Study for the Market in Vila da Feira (FIMS/AFT).

77 Sales, “Januário Godinho: a arquitetura como síntese. Diálogo entre tradição e modernidade”, 35.

78 Távora’s rich library contains a collection of volumes dedicated to Japan. On this topic, see João Cepeda, “Traces of Japan’ness in Modern Portuguese Architecture” (PhD work paper, Instituto Superior Técnico Lisbon, 2020), which lists some of the volumes on page 8.





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composed of physical elements but also and above all of immaterial paths. A principle, the serial repetition of simple elements at the service of a composite and flexible architectural system, which Távora summarises observing Japanese temple architecture in the idea of a “free symmetry” and a “mutual enrichment of elements”. As evidence of the recognition of a compositional principle among the constants he is searching for, in drawing 3c of *Notebook A*, sketched during a visit to Kiyomizu Temple, Távora notes: “I am not joking: I found here, as I found in other sites in Kyoto, something of Braga or Sintra - the water, the slopes, the stairs, the vegetation, perhaps the light... The temple of... frames the landscape, seen from the city”.

Moreover, the drawings drawn on the occasion show a clear affinity with the typical writing of the Tavorian project [Fig. 35, 36].

A second theme, closely related to the principle of “free symmetry” and the mutual enrichment of elements, is the use of a modular grid. This principle returns in Távora’s projects and would obviously also require further investigation of the modernist crossing and the relationship with Le Corbusier in particular.

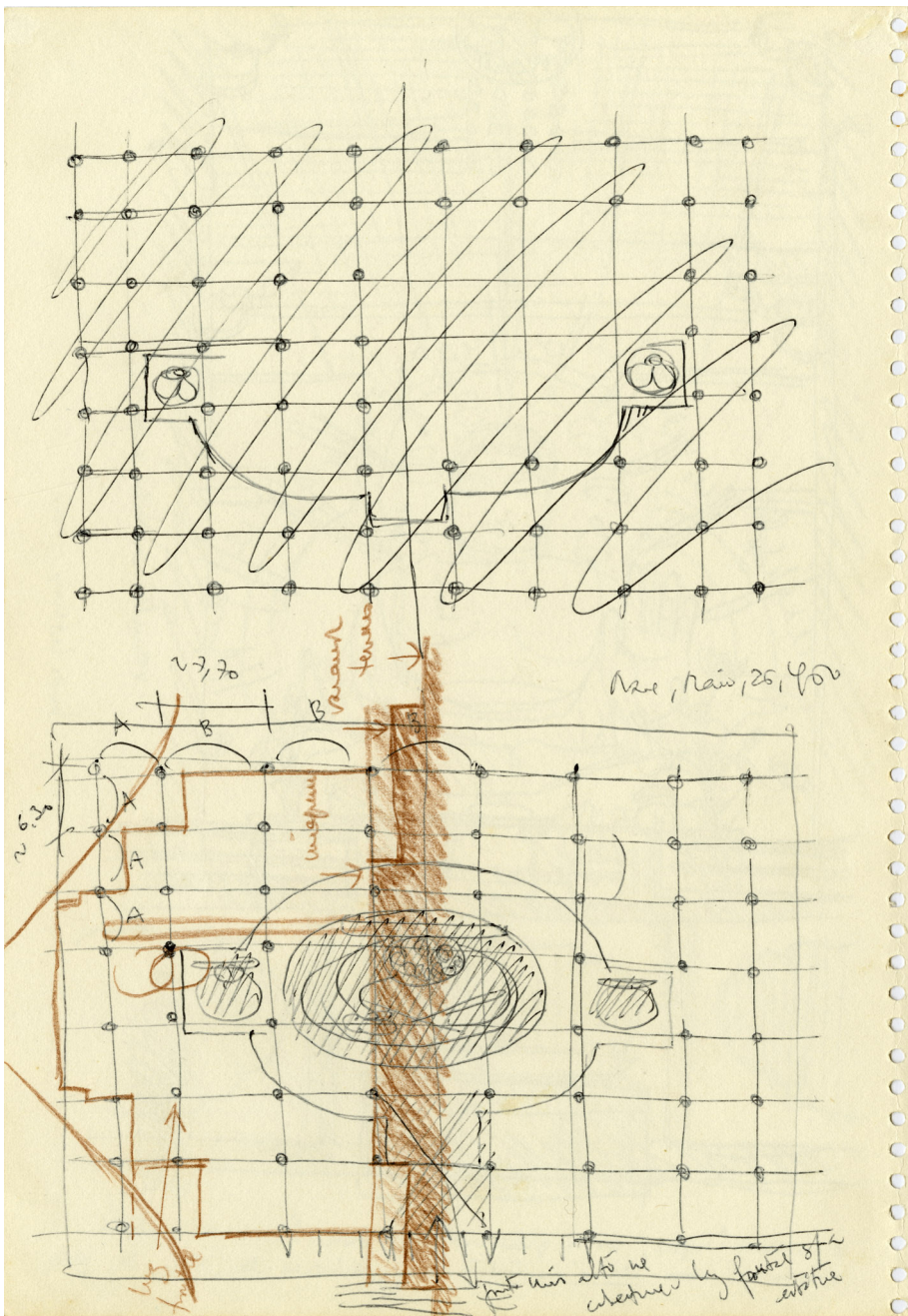
The Market, as mentioned, is based on a metric grid, a 50 by 50 metre square divided into modules of one metre by one metre. The “rule” of the tatami is among the aspects that most fascinate him on his journey through traditional Japanese culture. Still, a visit to the Ryoanji temple (27 May) suggests a decisive consideration in relation to the model of open and relational spatiality. The attempt to draw a survey of the temple complex based on modules failed,



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Fig. 35  
Fernando Távora, A Street in Kyoto, 22 May 1960, from the *Diário de "bordo"* (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 36  
Fernando Távora, Vila da Feira Market (FIMS/AFT).



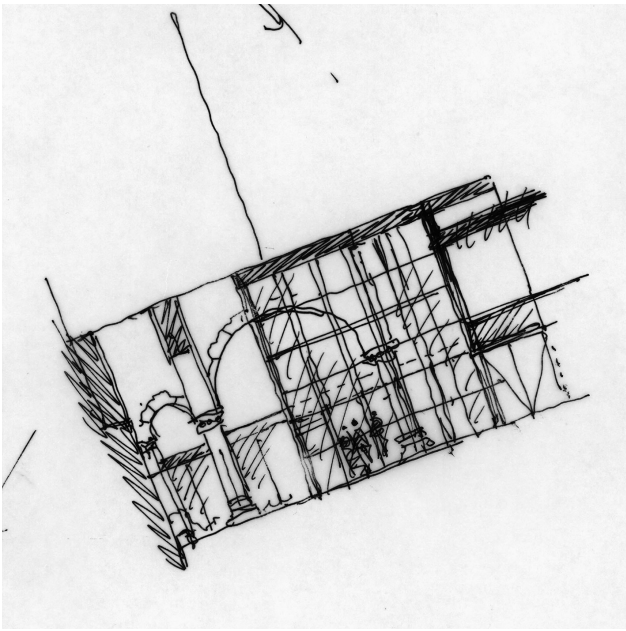
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because – he notes “modular rigidity, which we generally think of as the basis of Japanese architecture, does not exist” and “we constantly come across resounding kicks that are wisely placed on the modules”. The “spirit of the module” is always present, “the tatami generally does not make mistakes”, but the position of the pillars offers “extraordinary surprises” due not to error but to “a wise richness and freedom” [Fig. 37].

A coexistence of rule and transgression, rigour and freedom that, once again, is for Távora a recognition.

This is a lesson that will take him beyond the elementary nature of the square grid chosen for the *Marketplace* into projects in which he will make much more sophisticated use of the module. One thinks of the project for the *Aula Magna of the Faculty of Law* (Coimbra 1993-2000), where the module is traced in an

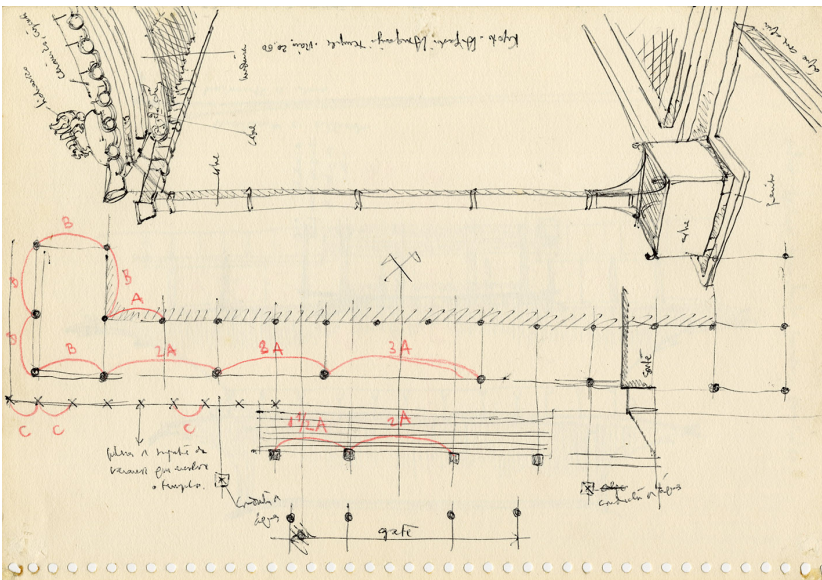
Fig. 37  
Fernando Távora, Daibutsu-Den in Nara, 26 May, 1960, from the *Diário de “bordo”* (FIMS/AFT).



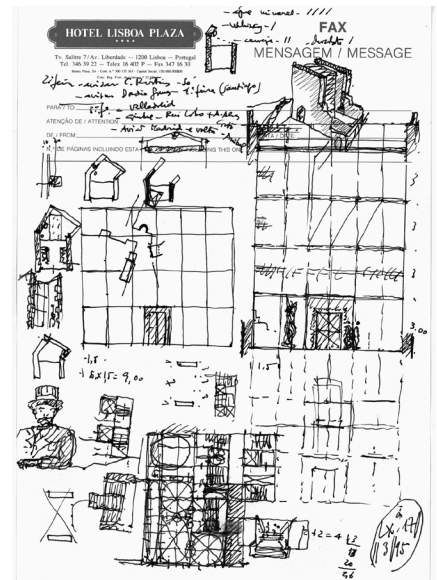
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existing ruin on the site and becomes a guide for the proportioning of the entire project, but with a variety of applications that certainly also recalls the lesson learnt in Japan [Fig. 38, 39].

Again, one thinks of the module as not metric but corporeal, the palm, which is the basis of the House of XXIV project (Porto, 1995-2003) [Fig. 40, 41].

However, already in the Market, one can observe a move away from the abstract and purely geometric use of the grid because it is given a material consistency evident in the study of the paving and, thanks to it, a variety that underlines the system of relationships on which the project is based and the diversity of 'opportunities' it offers [Fig. 42].

A third theme, already mentioned, intervenes in the Market to further complexify the structure determined by the geometric abstraction of the starting grid, its materialisation and variation, and the placement of the described pavilion

Fig. 38

Fernando Távora, Aula Magna of the Faculty of Law, Coimbra 1993-2000, study sketch (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 39

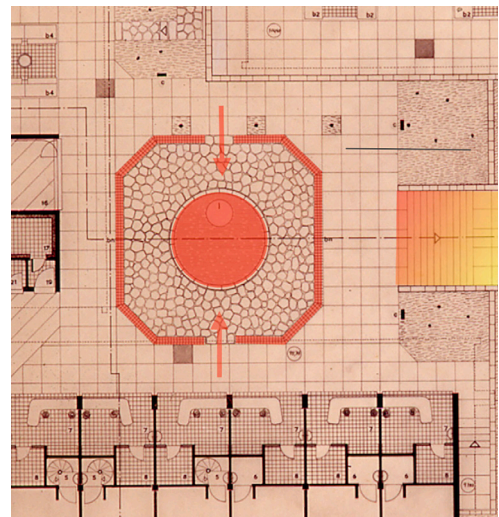
Fernando Távora, Aula Magna of the Faculty of Law, Coimbra 1993-2000 (photo by the author).

Fig. 40

Fernando Távora, Higashi Temple – Honganji in Kyoto, 20 May 1960, from the *Diário de "bordo"* (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 41

Fernando Távora, Recovery of the old Council Palace, "House of the XXIV", Porto, 1995-2003 (FIMS/AFT).



system on this grid hybridised with reflections of a phenomenological and experiential stamp.

The theme is that of the centre, which in the final design takes the form of a possible gathering of people on a long continuous concrete bench deployed around a fountain [Fig. 43, 44].

Thus, in a system of free crossings, we find an enclosure into which we must enter and which, in some way, interrupts, with a pause, the flow of passersby. We have already mentioned, in relation to the Tennis Pavilion and the Red Pavilion, the profound meaning that Távora attributes to these places of pause, suspension of action, encounter, and reflection.

Of course, here, as pointed out by Carlos Machado,<sup>79</sup> there is an echo of the question of the centre, of the “core of the city” that marks Hoddesdon’s CIAM VIII, Távora’s first participation in Congresses in 1951. Without now going into the

79 Machado, *The Market*, 32.

Fig. 42  
Fernando Távora, Vila da Feira Market (photo by the author).

Fig. 43  
Fernand Távora, Vila da Feira Market (photo by the author).

Fig. 44  
Fernand Távora, Vila da Feira Market, plan (FIMS/AFT, graphics by the author).

complexity of the debate that developed on that occasion on the subject, there is no doubt that Távora found it in keeping with his interests.<sup>80</sup> But in his case it is certainly not a question of revisionism of pre-war rationalism as much as a structural link with the historical city, and more precisely with his own city and its specific characteristics, taken as the matrix of the project. In 1954, the year he designed the Market, he, in fact, published the aforementioned text on Porto and its space.<sup>81</sup>

There is no doubt that the spatial model of the city of Porto, the combination of a city of flows – known in an experiential, corporeal form – but with spots that structure and hierarchise it, is among the matrices of the *Market* project.

The model of the historical city as understood by Távora, implies a specific idea of monumentality to which we have already alluded and which is very precise, in the Gulbenkian journey, in contrast to the American idea of monument and museum. It is the idea of a diffuse monumentality, which extends beyond the single “erudite” building, according to Távora’s already quoted expressions, and remains, on the model of Venice, always and in any case, a city.

The recognition of an ordinary monumentality takes place in Japan on the occasion of the – albeit unfortunate – fundamental visit to the Villa of Katsura. On 23 May, with his friend Samper,<sup>82</sup> he plans a visit that immediately proves too complex to organise. In the end, Távora goes along, complainingly, with the group visit already booked for the same day, and dedicates a sheet of *Notebook A* to the Villa, admittedly more written than drawn, partly because of the uncomfortable conditions of the visit, but above all to demonstrate that the values relevant to him are not formal. “Everything we call modern is there,” he notes in the Diary – Mies, le Corbusier, “less formally” Wright – all “the principles are those that have been inculcated in us for the last twenty or thirty years”.

But the notes on the drawing reveal other values that seem to prevail in making it, as he writes, “a jewel”.

First of all, the ordinary dimension, despite its imperial destination, is “a cross between a common dwelling and a palace”, “a building for a simple life of seated people”. He will find the same mixture of domestic character and, in this case, defensive character in the architecture of Nijō Castle (24 May), like Katsura, a true lesson in the clarity of the layout, the relationship between the architectural parts and their relationship with the garden.

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80 Direct evidence of this interest is a copy of the volume Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, Josep Lluís Sert, Ernesto Nathan Rogers, *CIAM 8. The Heart of the city: towards the humanization of urban life* (London: Lund Humphries, 1952) with handwritten notes by Távora, kept at AFIMS. But see also: Fernando Távora, “Entrevista”, *Arquitectura*, no. 123 (1971):152: “The topic was the core, seen as the heart, the centre. Not just referring to the urban centre, but specifically the need for a centre at any level of organisation in Architecture and Urbanism. For instance, the centre of a city or the centre of a house. Hence a quite comprehensive, architectonic, urbanistic and human vision about the need of the core as an element of spontaneous or organised, individual or collective life.” For a quick overview of the topic see: Leonardo Zuccaro Marchi, *CIAM 8. The Heart of the city as the symbolic resilience of the city*, in *HISTORY, URBANISM, RESILIENCE, The Urban Fabric*, edited by Carola Hein, 17th IPHS Conference, vol. II (Delft: TU Delft Open, 2016): 135-144.

81 Távora, “Do porto e do seu espaço”.

82 German Samper Gnecco (1924-2019), Colombian architect.

Fig. 45

Fernando Távora, Higashi Temple – Honganji, Kyoto, 24 May, 1960, from the *Diário de “bordo”* (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 46

Fernando Távora, 8 May Square, Coimbra, 1992-1997 (photo by the author).

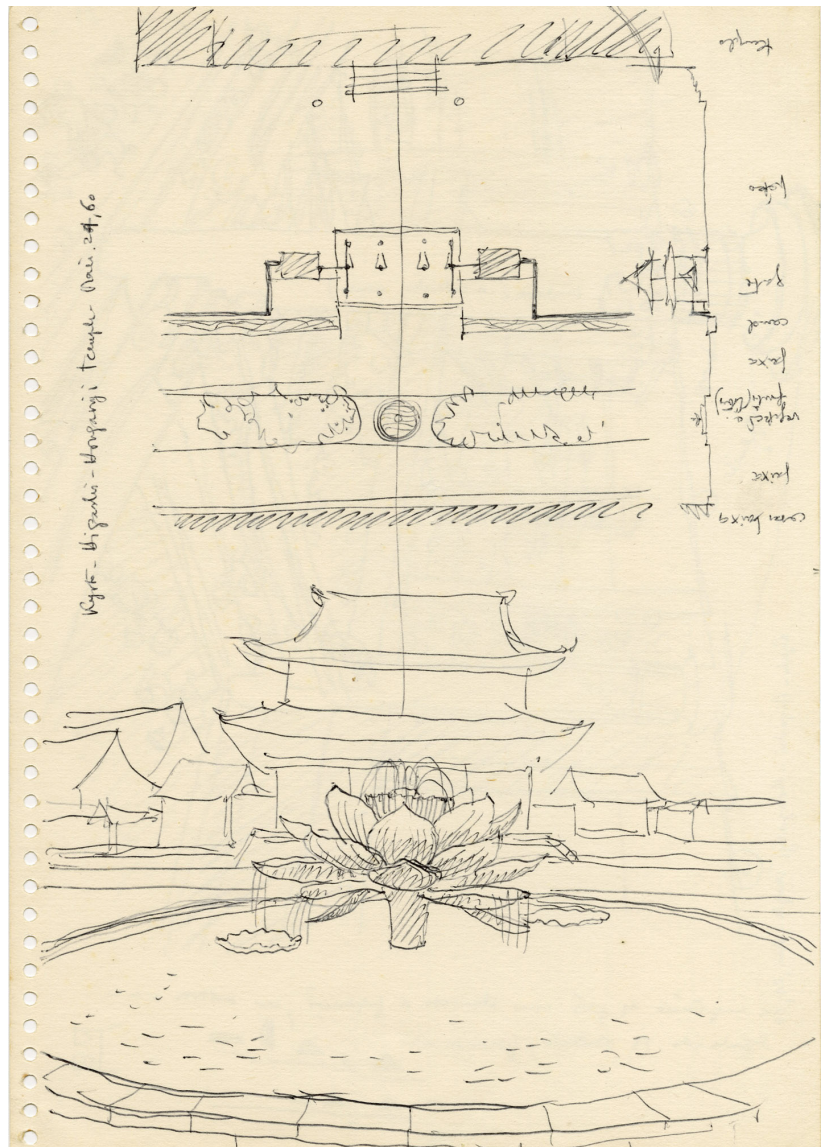
Fig. 47

Fernando Távora, Holiday House, Ofir, 1957-1958 (FIMS/AFT).

But more generally, the continuity between the ordinary and the monumental, between fixed elements and paths, characterises the spatial structure that Távora recognises in Japanese temple complexes. He was, therefore, “enchanted” by the lotus flower fountain at Higashi-Honganji, so much so that he drew it on 24 May, showing its role in the structure he visited and capturing its particular monumental tone.

It is a sober composition on a flat terrain. I made some drawings of the play of forms of the main temple, which I found very interesting. The composition is monumental, and I didn't think, who knows why, that the Japanese were capable of working at this scale. We have become accustomed to the idea of gardens, houses, low bridges, etc.; when we arrive here and see monumental things (as I had already seen in Nikkō), we are a little disoriented. It is evident how wood is exploited to its physical and plastic limits. The axis of the composition (of a free symmetry, Japanese style) extends to the street, where it is marked by a beautiful fountain representing a large bronze lotus (20 May).

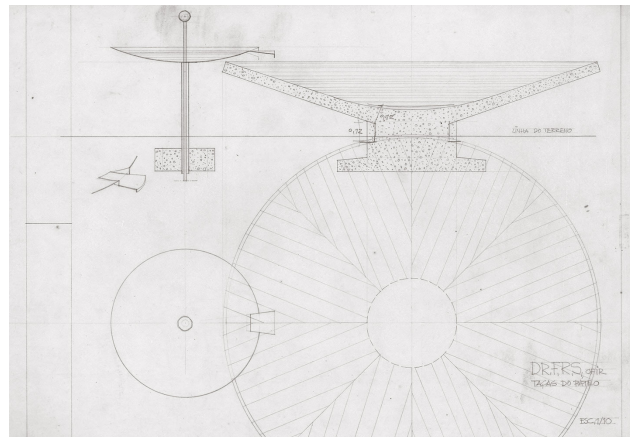
An element, the fountain, that Távora will take up, translating into projects such as the *House in Ofir* (see below) or the *8 May Square* (Coimbra, 1992-97) [Fig. 45, 46, 47].



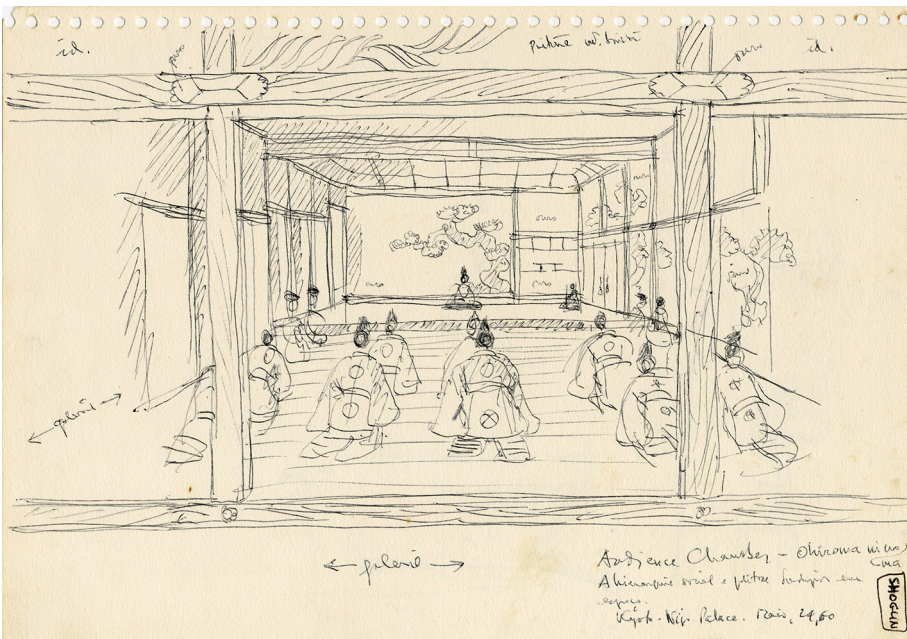
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A final theme, among those central to the Marketplace project, is the subject of an observation that subtly leads to the core of the Tavoran project.

To define a place, the *Market*, open to the city and capable of welcoming it, visually and in its flow of life, Távora in fact builds a basement that raises the whole, with respect to the street level. As seen he then articulates the Market floor in two platforms that he connects with a system of stairs. A small altimetrical variation that nevertheless contributes decisively to the transformation of a geometric structure, the square of the plinth, into a system of meeting occasions. This variation is accentuated by the arrangement of the pavilions, one of which is placed on the border of the two internal altimetry.

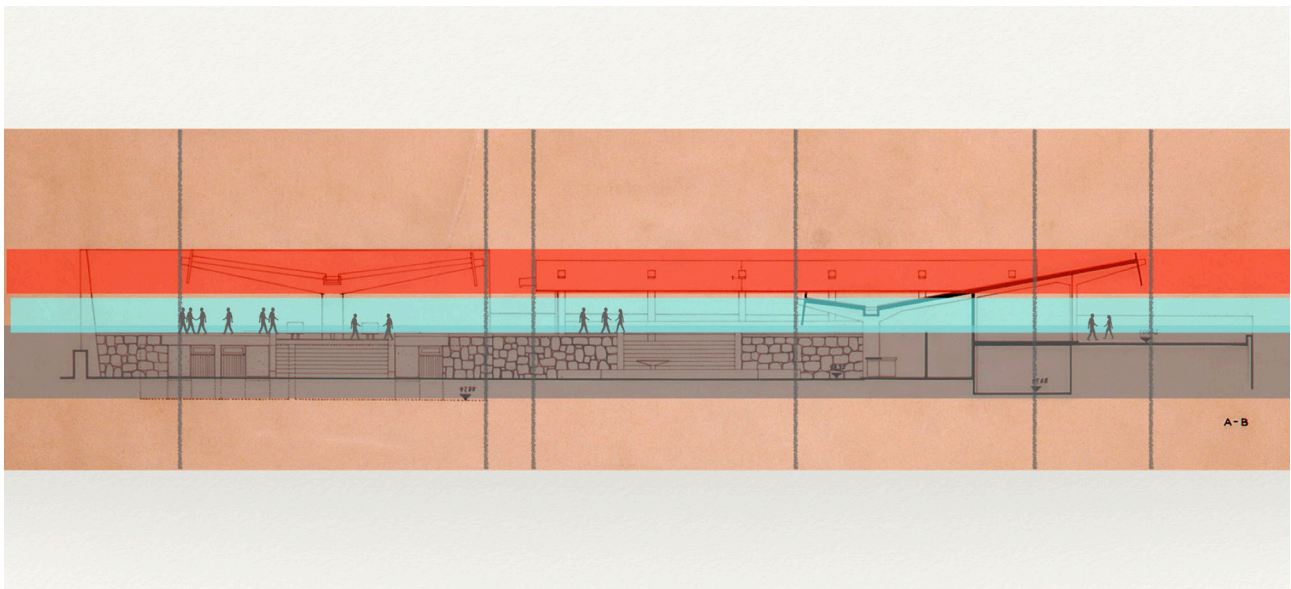
It is therefore not surprising that during the visit to Nijo Castle (24 May), Távora pays attention to the structure of the floor of the Shogun's Reception Hall and,

Fig. 48

Fernando Távora, Nijo Palace Audience Hall, Kyoto, 'Social and Political Hierarchy Translated into Space' 24 May 1960, from the *Diário de "bordo"* (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 49

Fernando Távora, Vila da Feira Market (photo by the author).



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in particular, to a small difference in height that separates and distinguishes the space intended for the Shogun and the space designed for the feudal lords. Távora sketches a reconstruction of an audience and notes

Social hierarchy and politics translated into space'. Space and the use of space, human presence, are indistinguishable elements of the architecture, and the subtly different character, the "curious and intelligent contrast" between the reception area and the Shogun's residence area, is achieved with minimal architectural variations: variations in size and level, and the tone of the paintings [Fig. 48, 49].

Távora recognises in that detail the use of altimetry as a tool to define and characterise spaces according to the principle of decorum as suspension and subtraction. A rewriting of the terrain that, for example, in the square projects – think of the long work on the squares of Guimarães or the aforementioned 8th of May Square in Coimbra – is intended to be, in addition to an "organisation of space", a "politics translated into space", according to the felicitous expression formulated in Japan.

But the architectural theme that, more than any other, anticipates and builds on Távora's theory of the organisation of space is certainly that of the intermediate space.

While the overall market concept consists of a basement element covered by suspended structures that leave the space below almost completely free, the altimetric articulation is not the only factor that transforms this space from an isomorphic space of a 'modernist' matrix to a complex system of possible relations [Fig. 50].

Aldo Van Eyck immediately grasped a shift from geometry to experience in Otterlo when Távora presented the work he had just completed. The Dutch architect, observing it, stated, "that the current notion of space and time should be replaced by the more vital notion of place and occasion."

Fig. 50  
Fernando Távora, Vila da Feira Market, section (FIMS/AFT, graphics by the author).





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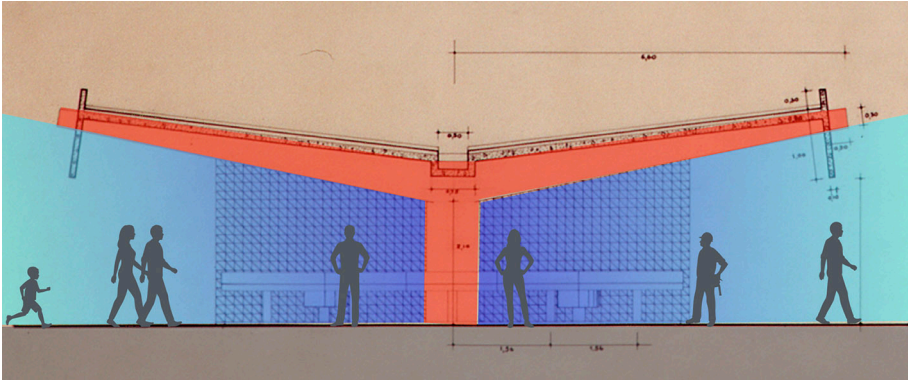
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Fig. 51, 52, 53  
Fernando Távora, Vila da Feira Market (photo by the author).

The place of occasion and encounter, the place of circumstance – a pivotal component of Távora’s vision of the project – is the intermediate space, devoid of a specific function, a place of encounter, of uncertainty, of decision-making regarding the possible options offered by the “open work” structure imagined by Távora [Fig. 51, 52, 53].<sup>83</sup>



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This emphasis on passage from space to space as a “change”, is also the subject of an act of recognition during a visit to Japanese temple architecture. The intermediate space appears to him as one of the main characteristics of temples. Visiting the Higashi Temple he notes “the importance of doors as an element of preparation; a feeling + or – unknown in the West” (*Notebook A*, drawing 11r, 24 May) [Fig. 54, 55, 56].

83 The reference to Umberto Eco’s famous book, published in the same year as the text on the *Organisation of Space* (Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta*, Milano: Bompiani, 1962 eng. trans. Id., *The Open Work*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) is not gratuitous if we think of the ties that unite Eco to Leonardo Ricci, an Italian architect whose research in the 1950s and 1960s had significant affinities with Távora’s research, starting with the theme of the Anonymous, which was also made explicit in a 1962 volume (Leonardo Ricci, *Anonymous (XXCentury)*, New York: Braziller, 1962). In this regard, see: Ilaria Cattabriga, “Leonardo Ricci and Umberto Eco. The Merging of Parallel Visions on the Scientificity and Openness of Experience in the “Ricci-Eco Motion”, *Histories of Postwar Architecture*, no. 10 (2022): 82-117.

Fig. 52

Fernando Távora, Vila da Feira Market, canopy section (FIMS/AFT, graphics by the author).

Fig. 53

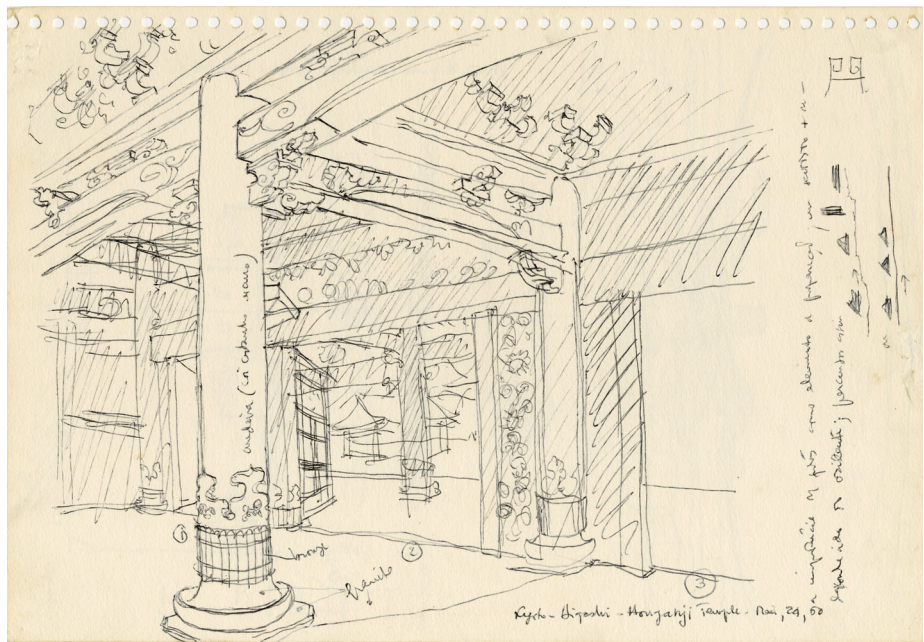
Fernando Távora, Vila da Feira Market (photo by Alessandra Chemollo).

The fluidity of space that relates the different elements of the temples and the surrounding nature returns in other occasions of observation, the ‘covered but open building’ in Nara, the veranda at the Kinkaku-ji Temple in Kyoto in which “the hall can open completely onto the lake / all open” [Fig. 57].

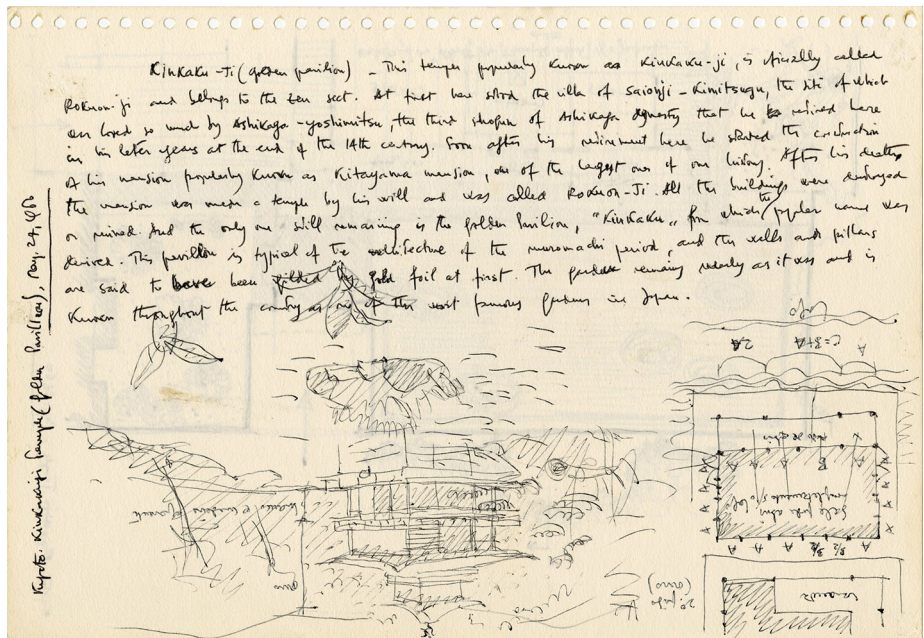
The theme of the in-between space returns as a basic compositional principle in *Holiday House in Ofir* (1956-1958), combining with other key themes also reflected in Távora’s various journeys in the decade 1950-1960.

The Fernando Ribeiro da Silva House, usually cited as the Holiday House in Ofir, is considered the work that, perhaps more than any other, represents all the themes of Fernando Távora’s passage from the tormented modernist, and more specifically LeCorbusian, formation to his own “third way”, heralded with the 1947 essay on *O problema da casa portuguesa*. The now substantial literature devoted to this work has defined its role well in the evolution of the Portuguese single-family house and, specifically, in the context of the experiments on the subject in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>84</sup>

Looking at it through the lens of Távora’s design research alone, there is no doubt that the continuity with the *Market* is remarkable. It could be said that the *House in Ofir* extends its experimentation by putting a single architectural element – in the *Market* the sales pavilion, here the body of the house – to



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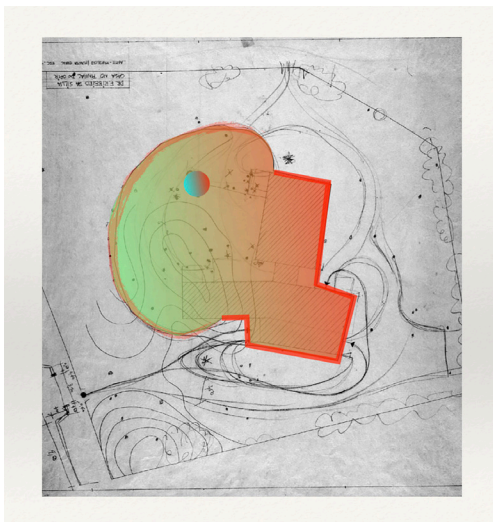


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Fig. 56  
Fernando Távora, Higashi-Honganji temple, Kyoto, 24 May 1960 from the *Diário de "bordo"* (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 57  
Fernando Távora, Kinkaku-ji Temple in Kyoto, 27 May 1960, from the *Diário de "bordo"* (FIMS/AFT).

84 See: Fernando Távora, "Casa em Ofir", *Arquitectura*, no. 59, (1957): 10-13; Michel Toussaint, *Summer house at Ofir, Portugal, 1957-1958*, (Lisbon: Editorial Blau, 1992); Ana Tostões, "Casas de Férias modernas, anos 50 e estilo contemporâneo. A utopia de uma doce vida", *Jornal de Arquitectos*, no. 196, (2000): 45; Nuno Seabra, Ricardo Gil Pedreira, "Como se escreve uma casa. A Casa de Ofir de Fernando Távora através do texto publicado", in: Távora, "Minha Casa", 254-271 (with bibliographical references); Eduardo Fernandes, "Távora's house in Ofir: Sustainability and vernacular knowledge", in *Structures and Architecture: A Viable Urban Perspective?*, edited by Marie Frier Hvejsel, Paulo J.S. Cruz. (London: CRC Press, 2022): 1307-1314.



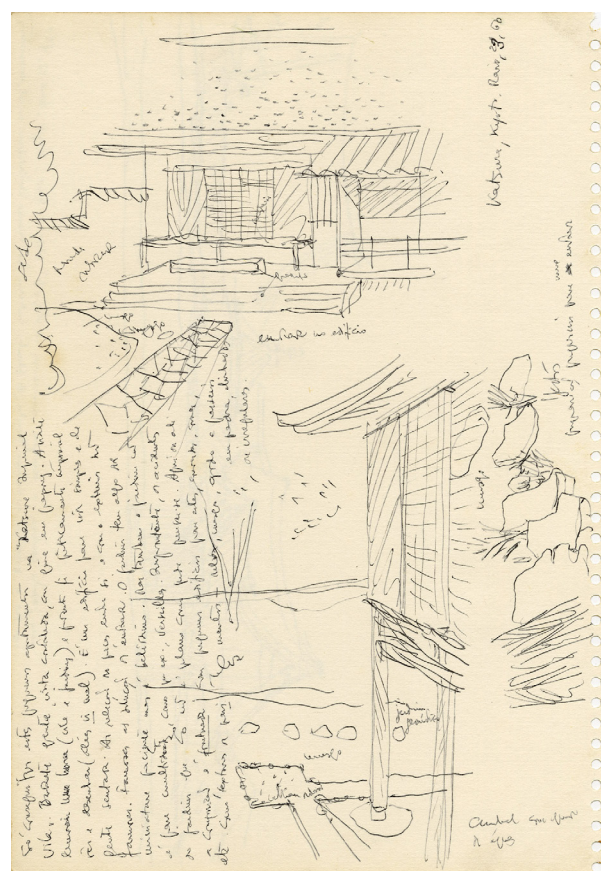
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the test of the landscape, rather than the city, in order to experiment with new potentialities of the relational space that is at the centre of Távora’s research in these years. A landscape captured in its broad geographical structure<sup>85</sup> but also designed, as Sergio Fernandez has pointed out, because the plot of land is, originally, flat, and Távora raises part of it so as to define – with a subtle but unequivocal gesture – the garden as an integral element of the domestic space.<sup>86</sup>

If the *Market* has, as we have said, a spatial dynamic centred on a void, an inhabited void, even in the *House at Ofir* there is no lack of an “aerial” focus – again, a decentralised centre – outside the architectural volumes marked by the circular concrete fountain placed in the garden. We have already mentioned how the fountain is the subject of a reflection at Higashi-Honganji [Fig. 58, 59].

But the most relevant moment of recognition, in traditional Japanese architecture, of an integrated space between house and garden is certainly the view at Katsura, which strikes him not only for its tone of “ordinary monumentality” as already mentioned, but also and above all for its relationship with the garden, since Katsura, Távora writes, is not a house with a garden but a “whole house-garden” [Fig. 60].



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Fig. 58  
Fernando Távora, Holiday home in Ofir, general plan (FIMS/AFT, graphics by the author).

Fig. 59  
Fernando Távora, Holiday home in Ofir (photo by the author).

Fig. 60  
Fernando Távora, Katsura Imperial Villa, Kyoto, 23 May 1960, from the *Diário de “bordo”* (FIMS/AFT).

85 Távora writes in the project report: “the terrain has its own shape, its own vegetation, its own structure; in summer the nerve-wracking north wind blows, in winter the chastising south-west wind; close by, in Esposende and Fão, there are constructions that have a very particular tone; on the other side of the river, not far away, there are granite and shale” (Esposito, Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera completa*, 319).

86 “Before construction, the land was completely flat. Távora made a little hill to enclose the space of the garden. Its main point is symbolised by a concrete fountain. The idea to connect the house with the site was interesting, but he went much further in modifying the natural topography to emphasise the spatiality. It was a very new attitude for us. It’s fantastic when you are there in this garden. You feel as if you were in a very generous, outdoor sitting room. For me, the scale is the most important aspect of this house. (Sérgio Fernandez, *House in Ofir*, 2020, text published online: <https://whatisahousefor.com/house/house-in-ofir-to-be-deleted> (last view, May 2024).

Even when visiting the Ryoanji temple in Kyoto celebrated for its garden (27 May), he exalted above all its relationships with the building, the mixed character of temple and house, the “play of closures and openings”, “the possible relationships of the interior spaces with their respective gardens. I will always remember a division there was on the rich red flannel cloth tatami (what a red – appropriately placed in an order – free Japanese style)’.

During the visit to Nijō Castle, the theme of the Japanese garden, the observation of the balance between the freedom of natural growth and the constant control, through design, of the quantity and quality of plant species as well as the relationships between them, leads him to a comparison with the growth of cities, the balance that is shattered when its dimensions get out of control and the city turns into chaos.

I believe that there is a continuous struggle between man and nature in these Japanese gardens because nature never stops growing, creating movement, acting, and changing. The concept of the Japanese garden is a static concept, according to which the plants must maintain between themselves and the spaces that separate them, that exact relationship that is considered perfect (clearly, this occurs in the small size, certainly not in the fields and forests). And I believe that the Japanese think so; because the truth is that for a certain space and for a certain building it is not indifferent that the essences have a given volume or its triple. There is a relationship that is exact and perfect (the same phenomenon happens with cities; their centres were created for a certain size, according to a certain relationship; the growth of cities as trees in neglected gardens alters the optimal proportion and we fall back into the chaos we know. It is simply easier to prune trees and tame them than to control city life). The Japanese completely possess the concept of the proportions of things: in a small lake (in Samper’s room, there is a 1.00x0.60 garden, with a lake, bridge, fish, stones and trees), they do not put big fish and vice versa. It is not so much a mania for miniatures as is sometimes thought, it is more an exquisite sense of harmony of the whole.

But in the *House of Ofir*, the relationship with the garden is only one element of a much more complex compositional exercise centred on the walled space.

The matrix of this space is planimetric. Three clearly distinct bodies – the living room, the bedrooms, the services – in fact three autonomous pavilions connected by an intermediate space, partly internal and partly external, that connects the access routes from the north – separate and distinct pedestrian and car entrances – to the garden, located to the south.

The paratactic, pavilion-like structure evident in the plan is, however, somewhat contradicted by the characterisation of two fronts of the complex: a northern front in which the walled surface prevails and a southern front open towards the garden to make it an integral part of the domestic space [Fig. 61, 62].



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This is an outline description that must be articulated point by point as it varies according to the basic principle of Tavorian composition, i.e., circumstantial occasion.

Fig. 61, 62  
Fernando Távora, Holiday home  
in Ofir (photo by the author).

To the north, we have the blind wall of the living room, with the long wall partition also blind. For a stretch, the wall flanks staggered the living room block, defining the entrance to the dwelling. Then, it delimits the volume of the garage and continues with a last stretch of free wall [Fig. 63].

The references, even just the obvious ones, are numerous.

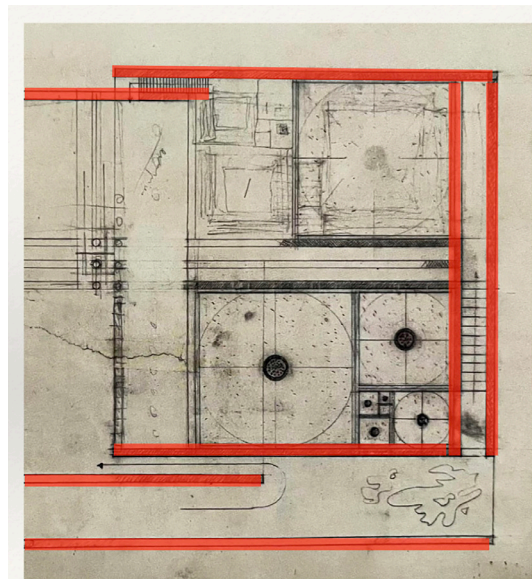
A critical reflection on the relationship between the walled box and the free wall septum, free septum which also recurs in the two wall wings extending towards the garden, suggesting its inclusion in the domestic space and contradicting, or making more complex, the pavilion structure of the two bodies destined, respectively, for the living room and sleeping area. In this interplay of staggered walls that generate an entrance tangent to an apparently compact body, which in fact does not exist as such, we discern Miesian echoes, a possible reference to the *Danteum*, which would be justified by Távora's interest in Terragni, and, certainly, the Baroque lesson of his beloved Niccolò Nasoni.<sup>87</sup>

But the idea of a walled shell protecting the domestic space open to the garden and integrated with it could indeed find many other references, from Portuguese folk architecture to a work such as Frank Lloyd Wright's Solar House [Fig. 64, 65, 66].<sup>88</sup>

Observing the north front in elevation, we then see the interest in neoplasticism – already present in the *Market* and, moreover, mentioned in the project report of the house – evident in the way Távora grafts the body of the chimney and, quite gratuitously, brings out the parallelepiped volume of a niche which, on the inside, flanks the dining table, interrupting the texture of the granite wall painted white with a reinforced concrete element. The north wall is, in fact, all a skilful and almost provocative play of contradictions that physically translates the idea of a compound expressed literally in the project report:<sup>89</sup> the external



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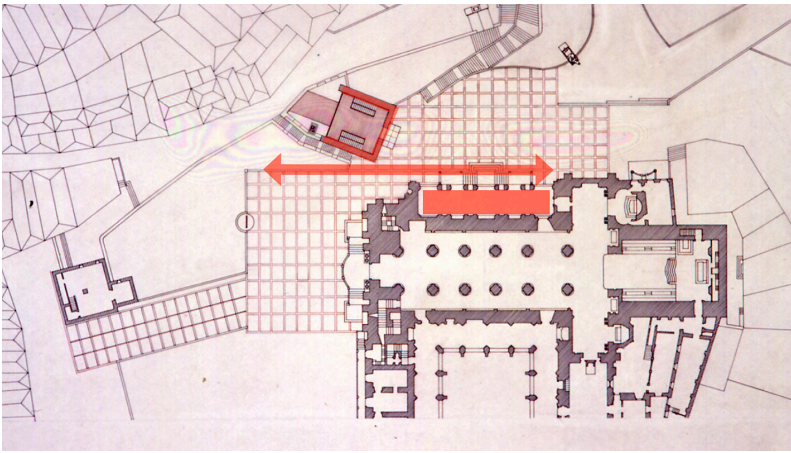
87 A project in which Távora explicitly refers to the Italian architect, active in Portugal, Niccolò Nasoni (1691-1773) is the one for the already mentioned *House of XXIV* in Porto. Eduardo Souto de Moura emphasises the reference in an interview: "The building could only be realised by knowing the site and the archaeology of the pre-existing building, understanding the Baroque, the importance of Niccolò Nasoni and the relationship with the Loggia he built on the side of the church... The Loggia, for example, benefits from the fact that the passer-by used to look at it from the front but no longer does because the space available has been reduced. As you walk around the tower, the Loggia appears in foreshortening, allowing you to appreciate how Nasoni treats the Baroque stereotomy and softens it. It is a relationship that I only understood when walking with Távora, who walked through the space staying close to the Cathedral and narrowing the visual angle; I seemed to grasp the spirit with which Nasoni conceived the building, a Baroque spirit in search of proportion, not classical contemplation." (Porto, 13 January 2002, partially published as Eduardo Souto de Moura, "La Torre di Távora", *Casabella*, no. 700, (2002): 64.

88 Frank Lloyd Wright, *Herbert and Katherine Jacobs Second House*, Madison, Wisconsin 1946-1948.

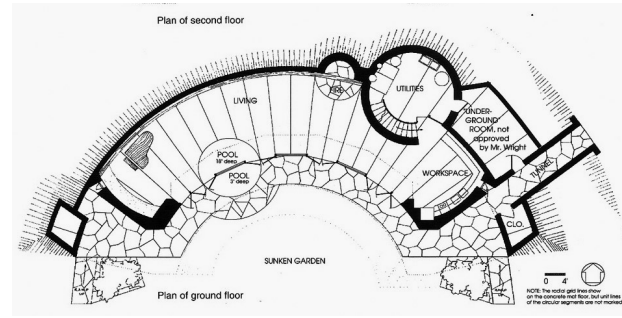
89 "One of the most basic notions of chemistry teaches us the difference between a compound and a mixture, and we believe that the essence of this notion applies perfectly to the specific case of a building. In reality, some buildings are compounds, others are mixtures (without mentioning those that are simply concoctions...), and, in the case of this building constructed in the pine forest of Ofir, we wanted it to be a true compound, a compound in which an infinity of factors came into play, certainly of variable value, but all, all to be taken into account." (Cf. Esposito, Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera completa*, 319)

Fig. 63  
Fernando Távora, Holiday home in Ofir, general plan (FIMS/AFT, graphics by the author).

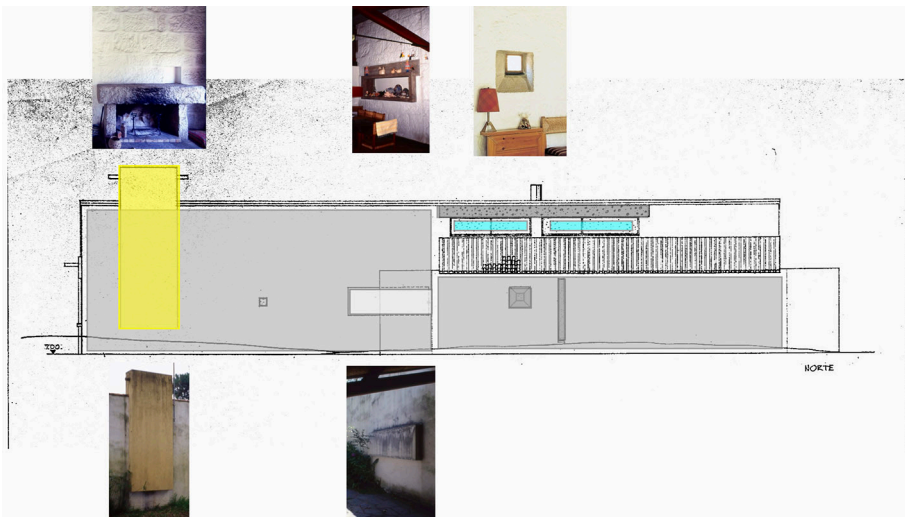
Fig. 64  
Giuseppe Terragni, Pietro Lingeri, *Danteum*, 1938 (graphics by the author).



65 66



“white wall” membrane cladding that on the inside reveals the traditional granite structure, but this too painted white; the external chimney is yellow, abstract, but the internal fireplace is a trilithic granite structure that visually dialogues with the aforementioned concrete niche, ironically equipped with a lintel [Fig. 67].



67 |

On the north side the composite exercise consists of suggesting a continuity of the “shell” that protects the house on that front, a shell that is actually, as we have seen, a complex, discontinuous, and permeable space. On the south side, the effort consists in constructing the boundary line between the interior space of the house and the garden not as a separation but as a place of exchange and continuity.

As mentioned above, on the extreme sides, two free walls extend beyond the line of the front of the two pavilions they define – the living room and sleeping area – suggesting an embrace of the north wall with the garden space. This extension of the wall not only contradicts the pavilion structure of the two bodies, making them not isolated elements but articulations of a whole but defines on the front of the living room a filtering space between the pavilion and the garden, a paved space in continuity with the intermediate space of the entrance and with a more closed portion of the living room that houses the fireplace.

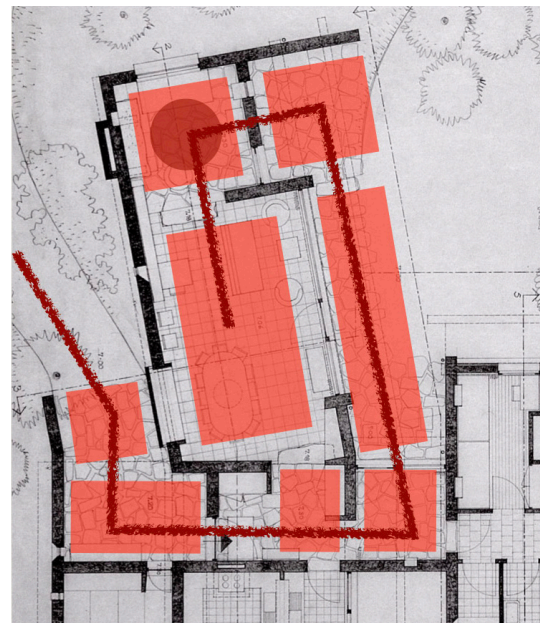
Fig. 65  
Fernando Tavora, House of XXIV, general plan (FIMS/AFT, graphics by the author).

Fig. 66  
Frank Lloyd Wright, Herbert and Katherine Jacobs Second House, 1944-1948.

Fig. 67  
Fernando Távora, Holiday home in Ofir, elevation (FIMS/AFT, graphics by the author).



The continuity of the pavement – in opus incertum stone – highlights how the living room “pavilion” is not an autonomous element but, in reality, a component of a spiral space that unfolds around the large glazed dining-living room space, leading from this, with a small but significant difference in height, to the square-plan vestibule housing the fireplace – the second off-centre of the house –, then to the patio that unites the body of the living room and the garden, finally creeping between the three pavilions, which it connects but without establishing a centre, since this intermediate space remains a path-space and leads to the entrance to the house enclosed between the two staggered walls mentioned above and which constitute the protective shell of the whole. The opus incertum paving is then repropose in the proximity of the other wing that suggests, in the night pavilion, the embrace of the garden [Fig. 66].



68

The interplay of references, as can be seen, is complex and Távora, who describes his projects in short, seemingly literary but, on a non-superficial reading, always revealing texts, lists several of them in his report for the *House of Ofir*:

the architect has his own cultural, plastic and human background (for him, for example, the house is not simply a building), he knows the meaning of words such as organicism, functionalism, neo-empiricism, cubism, etc., and, in parallel, he feels a boundless love for all manifestations of spontaneous architecture in his country, a love that comes from far away.<sup>90</sup>

One might say this evocation of distance, in space and time, even with respect to the most immediate reference – Portuguese “spontaneous architecture” – immediately reminds us of the idea of the journey as a necessary act, even in the case of proximity, to recognise the project’s constants.

An “anarchist’s” journey into modernism, as we might define it following Távora’s writing, using neoplasticism, Le Corbusier, and other references highlighted above.

A “journey across the homeland”, according to the definition we have given it, although in the *House of Ofir*, even on this front, the distances covered by the project are considerable compared to other contemporary works.

The functional breakdown of the house into three “pavilions”, as Sergio Fernandez points out.<sup>91</sup> is a departure from popular domestic architecture, the work’s first and most prominent reference. It is difficult to say, however, given the complexity of relationships now highlighted, whether this is a homage to LeCorbusierian functionalism or, somewhat, a critique of this hypothesis, or even, and perhaps better, an overcoming of functionalist experiments by

90 Esposito, Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera completa*, 319.

91 “Traditional houses never had such a scheme – three completely distinct and architecturally articulated zones never appeared in vernacular buildings”. Fernandez, *House in Ofir*.

Fig. 68  
Fernando Távora, Holiday home in Ofir, plan (FIMS/AFT, graphics by the author).

appealing to the deep and anonymous matrices of the same, thus putting them to the test of popular architecture as a direct and non-authorial translation of everyday life.

Moreover, an influence of Brazilian architecture has also been written about the *House of Ofir* in relation to the exhibition *Brazil Build. Architecture New and Old 1652-1942*, curated by Philip Lippincott Goodwin with photographs by George Everard Kidder Smith, staged at the MoMa in 1943 and shown in Lisbon in 1953.<sup>92</sup> The exhibition catalogue is divided into two sections, the first devoted to historical, mostly monumental architecture and the second to new modern Brazilian architecture. Távora, who at the time of the design of the *House of Ofir* knew and quoted the volume, has nevertheless repeatedly emphasised the paramount importance – in his education and, more generally, as a cultural model – of the figure of Lucio Costa. An acquaintance that came about within ESBAP and thanks to the teacher Carlos Ramos. In fact, Costa visited Portugal for two long periods, in 1952 as director of SPHAN (*Service of National Historic and Artistic Heritage*) and in 1961 invited to ESBAP by Ramos, with the aim of studying Portuguese popular architecture. His methodological indications are fundamental, as Ramos himself acknowledges, for similar Portuguese research. Costa emphasises the link between Brazilian architecture and Portuguese architecture, stating that it is necessary for him to first know the history of Portugal in order to then understand the Brazilian evolution up to the modern, the tendency of the house to open outwards and the negation of the roof up to the flat roof. A rootedness of innovation in the constants of anonymous popular architecture certainly akin to the process followed by Távora but foreign to the comparison between ancient and modern monumental excellences on which the MoMa exhibition is based; an initiative, moreover, that is entirely American and internal to the project of continuity of architectural internationalism from which Távora detaches himself.<sup>93</sup>

About the *Inquerito* matrix of the project, certainly significant – with respect to other contemporary works discussed above with which the house shares an actualisation of tectonic nodes – is the use of materials, the forcing of traditional ones – granite painted internally and clad externally – and the combination of

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92 Philip Lippincott Goodwin, *Brazil Build. Architecture New and Old 1652-1942*, photographs by G. E Kidder Smith. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1943). For the relationship between the *House of Ofir* and Brazilian architecture see: Paulo Tormenta, "Fernando Távora – Do Problema da Casa Portuguesa, á Casa de Férias de Ofir", *DC Papers: Revista de crítica y teoría de la arquitectura*, no. 9-10, (2003): 61-71; Hugo L. Farias, "La Casa: Experimento y Matriz" (Tesis Doctoral, Directores Y. Bonet Correa, J.F. Ganhão Da Cruz Pinto, Madrid 2011), 29-129; Tiago Nuno Freitas, *Brazil Builds-interferences in Portuguese Summer houses*, Conference Young Scientist, (Košice: s.e., 2015).

93 Philip Lippincott Godwin (1885-1958) signed the exhibition and its catalogue as president of the American Institute of Architect, in addition to being a consultant to Moma. His introduction to the volume begins: 'The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the American Institute of Architects in the spring of 1942 were both anxious to have closer relations with Brazil, a country which was to be our future ally. With this motive and with a keen desire to know more about Brazilian architecture, especially their solutions for the problem of controlling heat and light on large exterior glass surfaces, a flying trip was undertaken. George Everard Kidder Smith, architect, accompanied me to record scenery and architecture; the colonial had been widely photographed – the modern almost not at all. (Goodwin, *Brazil Build. Architecture New and Old 1652-1942*). On Lucio Costa's relations with Portugal and Távora see: Lucio Costa, "Documentação Necessária", *Revista do Serviço do Património Histórico e Artístico Nacional*, (1937): 31-39; Madalena Cunha Matos, Tânia Beisl Ramos, *Um encontro, um desencontro. Lucio Costa, Raul Lino and Carlos Ramos*, VII Seminário DOCOMOMO Brasil, (Porto Alegre – Rio Grande do Sul, 2007); José Pessôa, Maria Elisa Costa, *Bloquinhos de Portugal: A arquitectura portuguesa no traço de Lucio Costa*, (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, 2013); Sara Silva Reis, "Fernando Távora e Lucio Costa, pontos comuns" (Integrated Master's Dissertation in Arquitectura apresentada à Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto, orient. J.M.N. Viana Brás Rodrigues, Porto 2017).

these with new materials, such as Omenilite covering the intrados of the roofs. This is a flashy, almost provocative dialogue, as we have seen in the comparison between the granite hearth and the concrete niche/window, which could be summed up overall as experimentation not so much with popular tradition as with the potential of the current ordinary materials and the possibility of combining them with the ordinary material of tradition. A search for banality rather than popular tradition, which corresponds well with the model of Cistercian sobriety expressed by Távora in his youthful diaries and which becomes, in time, that idea of decorum as a reduction of expressive means already mentioned [Fig. 69, 70].<sup>94</sup>

But certainly, the journey into Portuguese popular architecture – a genealogical journey that becomes, on the occasion of the Inquerito, institutional – can be traced back to the central and most innovative theme of *Ofir's House*, namely the study not simply of a relationship between interior and exterior space but of an intermediate spatiality understood as pure relational space.

The patio or courtyard, enclosed by the ensemble of these organisms, is an authentic open-air room. Stretching along the other sides of the courtyard, the various roofs and the drying room, where maize, beans and all the earth's produce in need of shelter and fresh air are stored and exposed to the sun, are raised on one or two storeys.... The continuity of the low-sloping roofs surmounts the leafy ceilings of the surrounding branches, embracing the whole and giving it a cosy appearance, immersed in the landscape [Fig. 71].<sup>95</sup>



69

94 The figure of Bergson appears, in Távora's private writings, above all in relation to an anti-technological and anti-specialist vision as a reminder of a tradition of austerity and the "essentialisation of life" that, even in a youthful formulation, offers excellent premises for the idea of design method based on "potential" resources existing in the place. Távora, as already mentioned, quotes Bergson mediated by Leonardo de Coimbra's *A Filosofia de Henri Bergson*, a text mainly dedicated to *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, published by Bergson in Paris in 1932: Leonardo Coimbra, *A Filosofia de Henri Bergson*, (Lisboa: Pensamento Português, 1932). Using the pages of one of the theorists of the Renascença Portuguesa Távora, in opposition to "a delirium of industrialisation" and the "orgy of technological innovation", he invokes "a new simplification of life", "a new purifying asceticism". To these references, he juxtaposes a reference to St. Bernard, "the austere friar", who – on another page of his youthful diaries – offers a decisive connection with the architectural sphere: "There is a typical case in the history of Architecture in which decisions of a moral order and a new concept of life were reflected in the forms that were created; it is the case of St. Bernard's reform, which produced a new and more rational form of architecture. Bernard's reform which produced a truly functional, superior and upright Arch. as he wanted his Order to be; Alcobaça is an example of this: there is no decoration for decoration's sake, no appearance, not even the decorative; there is only the spirit of Cister and integral adherence - as integral as the work of men can be". (Quoted in Mendes, *Ah, che ansia umana di essere il fiume o la riva!*). The call for a new austerity, substantiated by pre-modern models - is completed with reference to the "master" Le Corbusier, creating a very subtle and stimulating connection between his own search for an essential life (hence a project) and the concept of "maison - machine à habiter", a "supreme simplicity" of the machine or reinforced concrete in which "nothing is useless" and, consequently, "everything is functional". The result, writes Távora, of the influence exerted on Le Corbusier by the "Gothic in its best phase", therefore more "functional and, therefore, more ascetic". A "concept of life", visible above all in Corbusier's interiors, which brings to mind 13th century hermitism and refers to the ideals of St Francis, in whose Canticle "everything refers to the fundamentals".

95 So wrote Fernando Távora, Rui Pimetel and António Menêres in one of their reports: *Arquitetura Popolar em Portugal* (Lisboa: 1961): 38.

Fig. 69, 70  
Fernando Távora, Holiday home  
in Ofir (photo by Alessandra  
Chemollo).



70 |



71 |

SOUTO DE SANTA MARIA, GUIMARÃES, *Casas de lavoura*

CHOUSELAS, VILELA, AMARES, *Casa e sequeiro*

VENTUSELA, ST.º ESTÉVÃO DE BRITEIROS, GUIMARÃES, *Quinteiro de casa de lavoura*



Fig. 71  
*Arquitectura Popular em Portugal* (Lisboa: Gravura, composição e impressão Gráfica São Gonçalo 1961), 39.

It is, for Távora, the recognition of a true design obsession.

I have always had a certain obsession with the question of the window because the window is really a hole through which you touch the outside. So in the contact between inside and outside, the door or window is fundamental. And actually, what people see, how they see it and what they see is fundamental in a house. Consequently, I have an obsession with open and closed spaces and the relationships between spaces.<sup>96</sup>

Although, remaining with the trips across the homeland, it is also necessary to mention another reference whose fortune in Portuguese architectural culture differs greatly from the *Inquerito*.

On several occasions, Távora recalls that his encounter with Raul Lino's work took place within the family as a boy because of a book given by his father to his brother Bernardo with a dedication "for my son Bernardo, so that in his professional activity he will always follow the great masters".<sup>97</sup> But the link is more profound and more personal. First and foremost, Lino's interest in travelling within Portugal since the late 1990s and in travelling abroad, such as to Brazil, which Távora mentions in connection with assimilating folk art.<sup>98</sup> But the cosmopolitan Távora can certainly also be interested in Lino's references to the architecture of Morocco, which manifests itself – according to Pedro Vieira de Almeida, curator of the controversial exhibition dedicated to him in 1970 – in projects such as the Monsalvat houses (1901), Silva Gomes, O'Neill (1902), Tânger (1903).<sup>99</sup>

Lino is also a connecting figure for Távora, like his master Carlos Ramos himself, with 19th-century English and German culture, and thus with the innovations in domestic architecture developed in these areas.<sup>100</sup>

Many of the principles enunciated by Lino, experimented in built works such as the *Casa do Cipreste* (1912), return in Távora's research and are evident in the design of the *House of Ofir*: attention to the site; the planimetric study as the generator of the project even in its volumetrics; the paratactic structure and the specificity of each component; the use of local techniques and labour understood as the geographical foundation of the project; the importance of

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96 Agrasar, "Eu realmente não posso ver uma janela sen ver do lado de lá": entrevista con Fernando Távora", 23.

97 Távora, *Para a Edifícios*, 3.

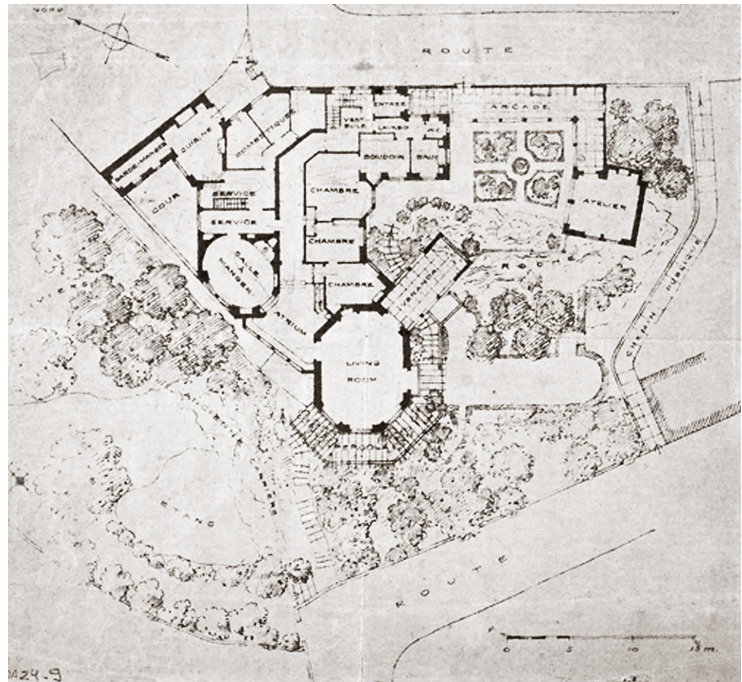
98 Ral Lino, *Auriverde Journada. Recordações de uma viagem ao Brasil* (Lisboa: Valentim de Carvalho, 1937); Távora, *As Raízes e os Frutos*, 433.

99 See: Pedro Vieira de Almeida, *Raúl Lino, Arquitecto Moderno*, in Lino Pimentel ed., *Raul Lino. Exposição Retrospectiva da sua Obra*, (Lisboa: Oficinas Gráficas de Gris Impressores, 1970): 115-189.

100 Raul Lino (1879-1974), an architect from Lisbon, began his studies in Windsor in 1889, continuing them in Hanover and finally completing an apprenticeship with Albrecht Haupt (1852-1932). This path brought him into contact with the reform of English domestic architecture at the end of the 19th century. His work, immediately oriented towards the theme of the Portuguese house, was influenced by the study that first systematised its results, namely, *Das Englische Haus* by Herman Muthesius (Herman Muthesius, *The English House*, New York: Rizzoli, 1979). In 1918 he published, in Lisbon, *A Nossa Casa – apontamentos sobre o bom gosto na construção de casas simples*, a text in which he studied the forms of living in the different regions of Portugal. See, also for more extensive bibliographical references: Paula André, edited by, *Celebrando A Nossa Casa (1918-2018) de Raul Lino* (Lisboa: DINÂMIA/CET-IUL – Centro de Estudos sobre a Mudança Socioeconómica e o Território, 2018). Regarding Lino's influence on the *House of Ofir* see: Joana Carvalho dos Santos, "Architecture and Interior Space in Portugal" (Doctoral Thesis, Tutor Maurizio Vogliazzo, Politecnico di Milano, 2004).

a “natural” relationship between architecture and the ground on which it stands; the house as a “translation” of the client’s personality.

But the theme that we already find in Lino, and which will be one of the most productive and innovative in Távora’s research, is that of the elaboration of an intermediate space between interior and exterior, a theme that is also central, as we have seen, in the design of the *Market*.<sup>101</sup> In that work, the political significance of the intermediate space was emphasised, and the construction of a space of relationship and exchange in the structure of the pavilions and the void at the centre of the overall spatial device was conceived as a place of rest and encounter [Fig. 72].



72

In the *House of Ofir*, for obvious thematic reasons, the “political”, “civic” idea of a relational space leaves place for the idea, also central to Távora and closely related – to which we have already alluded in connection with the *Tennis Pavilion* –, of the need for a useless space, an architectural place removed from utility and economy. A place of relationship and free exchange, a place of conversation, of confrontation. In addition to the political value of such a space, the absence of which stands out as a mortifying lacuna in his journey through American culture, the aesthetic and philosophical value of the act of suspension that offers space to circumstance, to action not predetermined by architecture, is highlighted here. An act of welcoming experience within the project’s structure in which emptiness plays a central role as later theorised in the text on *The Organisation of Space*.<sup>102</sup>

Again, the theme, as we can see, is dense with references and finds moments of enthusiastic recognition in Japan.

At his friend Toshihiko’s father’s house in Tokyo (15 May), he notes: “Since the house is raised from the ground by 40 or 50 cm, the thresholds are an ideal space for sitting”. The visit to his friend’s father’s house is also an opportunity to observe the incompatibility between Western furniture and the spatial structure of the Japanese house without fixed walls. Again, an important experience in developing the idea of a continuous, fluid space, a compound of fullness and emptiness.

101 Nuno Portas emphasises the theme in his preface to the text on the Organisation of Space: “integration and rupture, between internal space (which is external and semi-external) and site” Nuno Portas, *Prefácio à edição de 1981*, in Távora, *Da Organização do Espaço*, VII-XXIV.

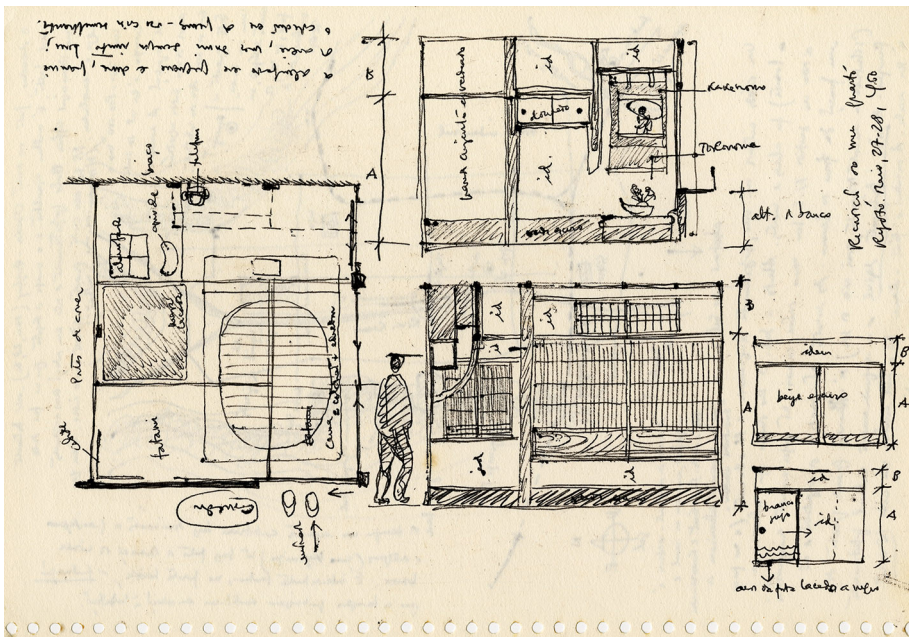
102 In 1962, Pedro Vieira de Almeida – whom we have mentioned as the one who recovers the figure of Raul Lino, going beyond his cultural and political responsibilities within the Estado Novo – wrote his *Ensaio sobre algumas características do espaço em arquitectura e elementos que o informam* and elaborated the idea of a transitional space, intermediate between interior and exterior, which he would later relate to vernacular architecture, developing its philosophical and political meanings. Several pages of the text, Vieira de Almeida’s degree thesis (C.O.D.A.), are dedicated to Távora’s text on *The Organisation of Space*, which came out that same year. The search for an intermediate spatiality between interior and exterior also characterises Álvaro Siza’s research in these same years. In this regard, we refer to: Giovanni Leoni, “Siza prima di Siza”, *Casabella*, no. 896, (2019): 3-21.

Fig. 72  
Raul Lino, Casa do Cipreste,  
San Pedro de Sintra, 1914.

Távora returns to the theme on 20 May by describing and drawing a hotel room – its physical characteristics and the way people live in it – and adding an illuminating comparison, confirming his cosmopolitan vision of architecture:

... Japanese entrances remind me of those in Venice because of what they have in common: the harbour, the change, the affirmation of the difference of worlds, etc. Our entry threshold here is very emphasised... the street penetrates the house, but the street-house separation is perfectly defined.

An insight, the relationship between traditional Japanese architecture's treatment of the threshold and the ordinary structure of Venetian passageways, which also illuminates Távora's interest in Carlo Scarpa's work [Fig. 73, 74, 75, 76, 77].



73



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Moreover, in the Japanese leg of the Gulbenkian journey, the “geographical” vision of the temples is inevitably intertwined with a constant evaluation of the relationship between architecture and the body, indicating a non-visualist but anthropological conception of architectural space. These are the living bodies of visitors, the body of Távora himself always in the foreground, and statues which, inserted in an architecture lacking an anthropomorphic matrix, take on a very special role.

At the Buddhist temple Sanjūsangen-dō (21 May), observing the 1001 statues of the Buddha, Távora defines “an uncommon principle”, by which he is “impressed”, the “repetition of similar (not the same) elements, along the whole extent of the building”. In Nara, he is struck by the “size” and “terribleness” of the Todaji guardian. Observations of rhythm and scale of presences that in Nijo Palace in Kyoto become more complex

Two days later, when sketching the Great Buddha Hall in Nara, Távora makes a comparison with Western spatiality, which is curiously evoked through a reference to the Lincoln statue in Washington.

Fig. 73  
Fernando Távora, Sketch of his room at the Seikoro Inn, Kyoto, 27-28 May 1960, from the *Diário de "bordo"* (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 74  
Fernando Távora, Holiday home in Ofir, general plan (FIMS/AFT, graphics by the author).



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Fig. 75, 76, 77  
Fernando Távora, Holiday home  
in Ofir (photo by the author).



Here the columns create a richness of space and a framing of the central figure that does not exist in Washington. It makes one want to turn, to see, to understand. The interest in unravelling the mystery of choosing the best viewpoint not only of the statue, which is not free (see how in plan the general base plays with the pillars) but is framed in a perfect architectural system ... part of the interior space ... (not) an extra thing in space. [Fig. 76]

A space that is not defined by geometry and perspective vision but generated by the body in motion.

A spatiality that is also found in the Katsura complex and its purest form is a continuity in the variety of architectural elements and spaces, "punctuated by small buildings for standing, talking, eating, etc."

It is important to specify that if his direct acquaintance with traditional Japanese architecture provides him with the opportunity to recognise the theme of relational space in the search for constants, his other experiences in that same country, on which he has the highest expectations of finding a traditional culture still alive and operating, show him, after the trip and in sequence with other visits, that the world is not the place endowed with "order and quality" that professional magazines present us with, but widespread chaos, a realm of discontinuity.<sup>103</sup>

This overcoming of youthful illusions of the recovery of harmony of space was decisive for the evolution of his architectural project and led us to another recognition that is useful for reading the design of the House of Ofir and the relationship it establishes with the garden and more generally, with the landscape.

### The Gulbenkian Journey, Reflections: Wright

It is difficult to say how much the visit to traditional Japanese architecture also contains a bit of Wrightian Japan, and how much the visit to East Taliesin preceding it on the same trip (9 April) contains something of Távora's passion for Japanese architecture. They certainly have in common the theme of the harmony of space and its overcoming in favour of a more disillusioned and more effective conception of relational space.



Fig. 76  
 Fernando Távora, Daibutsu-Den  
 Interior, Nara, 26 May 1960,  
 from the *Diário de "bordo"*  
 (FIMS/AFT).

103 Távora, *Da Organização do Espaço*, 42-43.

The encounter with Frank Lloyd Wright is one of the few encounters with “modern” architecture on American soil that was explicitly desired, prepared, and described with the typical enthusiasm of an architectural journey in the footsteps of the masters. So much so that Távora defines the visit to Taliesin East, the climax of the encounter, as a “shock, perhaps the greatest of my life as an architect.”

It is not an exaggeration to say that the encounter with Wright, an author present with no less than sixty-two volumes in Távora’s library and an obvious influence on his built work, has, at the date of 1960, a similar relevance to the encounter with Le Corbusier; two encounters that are also two overtakes. As we have seen, Le Corbusier is the author of reference in the ESBAP renewed by Carlos Ramos, taken as such also by the young Távora, who initiates a tormented lifelong relationship with him. At the beginning of the 1950s, Wright reappears on the scene of the Portuguese debate concerning the organicist vision, driven by Bruni Zevi’s positions in perfect parallelism and historical relation with what happens in Italy.<sup>104</sup>

If almost all the encounters with contemporary architecture during the American weeks of the Gulbenkian trip – from Mies to Kahn – are described as chance encounters approached with an attitude somewhere between the curious and the blasé, the numerous visits to Wright’s architecture are instead openly planned and have the tone of a study trip. Távora visits the Guggenheim (5 March) “with great curiosity”, bringing criticism but appreciating its fluid space that offers “the possibility of conversation” mixing art and everyday life. On 8 April, he visited the Johnson Wax, an aseptic visit, as an architect, which resulted in a highly positive judgement but concluded with a remark about the difficulty of reproducing such quality where Wright’s charisma, the “inestimable” publicity value of his signature and the consequent investment of the client were lacking. In the Chicago area (from 10 April) Távora then makes a canonical tour of Wright’s architecture and, in the course of the trip, also visits Taliesin West (21 April) and the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo (15 May).

The only properly architectural drawing of all the visits to Wright’s work is the sketch mentioned above of the Robie House, within the pages of the *Diary*, dated 16 April 1969.

However, the real “representation”, not drawn but written, of the encounter with Wright is reserved for the visit to Taliesin East (9 April), the place where Távora expects to encounter the full coincidence of life and work that he considers the

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104 Zevi’s *Storia dell’architettura moderna* (Turin: Einaudi 1950) was already published in Spanish at the time Távora wrote the *Diary* (Bruno Zevi, *Historia de la arquitectura moderna*, Buenos Aires, Emecé Editores, 1954) but would not be published in Portuguese until 1970 (*História da Arquitetura Moderna*, Lisboa, Editora Arcádia, 1970-73, preface by Nuno Portas). Távora, moreover, had attended Zevi’s lectures during his trips to Italy prior to the Gulbenkian trip and quoted his lectures in class with his students as early as the Gulbenkian trip years. In the early 1950s, in the context of the debate on organicism, interest in Zevi was considerable in Portuguese schools. Duarte Castel-Branco, an EBAL student, on his return from a trip to Italy proposed a Portuguese translation of *Architettura e storiografia* (Milan: Libreria Editrice Politecnica Tamburini, 1950) and published (1952) a number of pamphlets translating Zevi’s texts into Portuguese: *A Contribuição Finlandesa, from History of Modern Architecture; Da cultura arquitectónica* from Bruno Zevi, “Message to the Congrès International d’Architecture Moderne. Della cultura architettonica”, *Metron*, no. 31-32, (1949): 5-30; *As diversas idades do espaço*, from *Saper vedere l’architettura* (Turin: Einaudi, 1948) (Cf. Lixa Oliveira Filgueiras, “A Escola do Porto 1940/69”, in *Carlos Ramos. Exposição retrospectiva*, n.p.). Ana Mesquita, in her study on the *Diario*, mentions at several points the influence of Zevi’s *History of Modern Architecture*, even considering it a “filter” through which Távora observes the architecture he gradually encounters (Cf. Mesquita, *O Melhor de Dois Mundos*). Regarding the process of constructing the figure of an “organic” Wright in Zevi’s writings see: Roberto Dulio, *Introduzione a Bruno Zevi*, (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2008), in particular the chapter *La metafora di Wright*.

most precious value of Wright's teaching for him. This is an expectation that certainly influences the mode of the visit, which is completely different from the visits to other Wrightian works.

The visit generates a narrative apparently dominated by inspired and idyllic tones, which, in reality, are dense with tensions and contradictions and dominated by a sort of self-defence from the architectural personality of the Master. Távora seeks a comparison with a model for his architecture, perhaps with "the" model after the disappointment of his encounters with Le Corbusier's work during his first trips to Europe; but not a formal model so much as a model of method. He almost seems to fear that Wright's architectural prowess might overpower him, take him away from the methodological structure that interests him. Thus, he returns to the non-direct but transversal encounter he reserves with other "modern" architects during the trip. "I came from Portugal to see Taliesin" he exclaims at the first difficulties. Still, it is a fact that he has not really organised the visit, has not gathered information about the means, and finally reaches the place with a process, based on circumstances, that is very reminiscent of the structure of his design method: he wanders around Spring Green, gathers information from passers-by, finally snatching a lift from an elderly gentleman who has stopped at the Post Office with his car. "If the post office had closed before I had solved my problem, I don't know what would have become of me".

The driver found by chance turns out to be a mason who helped build Taliesin and, as a result, knows the complex well, becoming, in effect, a guide. The entire visit takes place without Távora hardly ever getting out of the car, and the Diary's register doubles.

The words of the driver-mason – as a heteronymous – prosaically illustrate Wright's work.

Protected by this lowering of the tone of Wright's work description entrusted to the guide, Távora elaborates on his considerations about Wright as a man looking for himself in Wright and Wright in himself in his typical attitude of a cosmopolitan traveller.

The first vision he is struck by when passing through Taliesin is already his vision about architecture at that moment: the disappearance of architecture as a form in itself in favour of a spatial continuity involving every aspect of what exists. Here the key term is still, however, 'landscape'.

Taliesin is a landscape, Taliesin is a whole, in which it is perhaps difficult to distinguish the work of God from the work of man.

There is still the nineteenth-century Romantic, Ruskinian and Morrisian overtones that often surfaced in the younger years and which the Gulbenkian trip would definitively dismiss. As the visit progresses Távora begins to get emotional, especially when he arrives at the cemetery where Wright is buried with his family, but the driver-mason "is eager to show me things" and Távora finally gets out of the car only once he reaches the Master's studio.

Rather than assessing the building with the critical acumen demonstrated at the Guggenheim and Johnson Wax, however, Távora peers inside, imagining the life that took place there when Wright lived there. He does not dwell on the details but captures “a richness of form, a naturalness, that I have never found in contemporary architecture” and recognises, in a process of clear identification, the ability to breathe life back into historical constants in modern architecture.

I felt myself in the Middle Ages, in Greece, in Mexico, in the presence of a cathedral, a Parthenon, and an Aztec temple; such is the integrity of this architecture.

But the guide presses on, and the visit continues, still in the car, until, having arrived at the house, Távora pulls up, takes a photograph, and finally feels that he lacks “the courage to continue”. “I felt that I had already understood Taliesin and that I was emotionally exhausted”.

The exact two hours of the visit, as Távora specifies, leave him in the grip of an attack of Stendhal syndrome: as if possessed, “far away from myself and far away from everything” he wanders into the countryside on a dusty road and cries “like a child”. Taliesin “is a landscape” but it is also “a life”, “a philosophy”.

Because Taliesin struck me precisely for what it possesses of total, of cosmic, for what exists beyond stone, wood, this or that formal refinement.

But even in the emotion and mourning, Távora does not seem to lose the lucidity of an analysis that places the figure of Wright with great precision in his own cultural project without neglecting the main critical positions established at that time.

The all-encompassing power of Taliesin, he writes first of all, makes one forget the “incidental” aspects in Wright’s life, “the formal whims”, “the vanity”, “the cost of the works”, “the cars”, “his little everyday things”, aspects that Távora nevertheless lists. The element of greatest contrast between his own position and Wright’s position – a project dominated by personality – is thus placed on the sidelines, becomes incidental.

Having done so, Távora brings Giedion onto the scene, but not through a direct quotation from his *Space, Time, Architecture*, as much as by recalling a line he heard personally on an unspecified occasion. A mode of appropriation typical of the heteronymous personality, used by Távora. In Távora’s memory, Giedion, “with a smile”, snatches Wright away from the “notorious integration of the arts” as he was himself a “painter, sculptor and architect”. The seemingly casual and innocent recollection is worth a critical essay if we remember that Giedion’s text, decisive for the post-war redefinition of Wright’s role, was written in the late 1930s, in a Harvard just under Walter Gropius’ guidance. The reported consideration, which does not exactly coincide with the formulation of the theme that

can be read in *Space, Time, Architecture*,<sup>105</sup> turns into the occasion for a veritable attack on functionalism – Gropius’s house seen on 26 March now appears to him, he writes, as “a refrigerator resting on a hill” – which is followed by Wright’s dragging back into the Great Tradition. His ability to create continuity between architecture, painting, and sculpture, as well as between urbanism and landscape, can be traced back to the lessons of ancient Greece or Gothic culture. Wright thus emerges from the genealogy of the “modern”. Not a prodrome but an alternative or, rather, an external line of continuity of historical constants. An architecture still capable, unlike the works of Le Corbusier or Mies, of producing ruins, of incorporating what, for Távora, is the raw material of the project, a temporality of long duration that exceeds the life of the individual work.

Wright’s lesson is the “power of integration” and, in the enthusiasm of his visit to Taliesin, it appears to him as a radical alternative to the America of quantity, of technique for technique’s sake, of money for its own sake.

In perfect parallelism with a potential Le Corbusier interpreter of the Swiss regionalism that Távora has been yearning for all his life, making him somehow participate in the construction of his own heteronymous personality, there appears here a Wright interpreter of an America that, by visiting it, he certainly did not find. An America that has gathered, as in Pessoa’s vision or in Ortega y Gasset’s considerations that are so present at this height, the ultimate destinies of a tradition that from Greece passes through Rome and perfects itself in Europe.

It is, therefore, no coincidence that, at this point, Távora brings in Zevi, cantor if not the inventor of the “organicist” Wright, whose words he almost steals:

Wright succeeded in creating organisms. Who dares to question the shape of a finger, the colour of a flower or the beak of a pelican? They are so... because they are so.<sup>106</sup>

A Wright, the one who moves Távora to Taliesin East, perfectly functional to post-war European pro-Americanism.

However, in the final balance of this and other visits to Wright’s work, even in admiration, there remains a difficulty in assuming the model, which concerns the constant and necessary presence of Wright’s enormous personality.

From the *Diary* emerges a multifaceted Wright, certainly admired for his architectural prowess, feared for the same reason, a heteronym put to the test of a possible identification, in fact, set aside and, at the same time, kept as a more akin model if the tasks of architecture had not by then radically changed. The parallelism with Le Corbusier’s process of appropriation and rejection is visible, one and the other exceeding, in their greatness, the season of the Modern, to which they also belong, but both no longer acceptable as masters tout court for

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105 Cfr. Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture. The Growth of a new Tradition* (Cambridge MA: Harvard university Press, 1959), third edition, pp. 409 ff., the chapter *Aesthetic direction*.

106 “When you call Wright’s architecture organic, what do you mean? Essentially two things: 1) that his buildings are as intact as living organisms” Bruno Zevi, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, Milano: Il Balcone, 1954: 21; but the quoted text is from 1947.

reasons unrelated to their greatness. A double bond, with one and the other runs through all of Távora's theoretical and constructed work.<sup>107</sup>

Two years later, bringing into academic form many of the thoughts developed during the trip, Távora makes a parallel critique of the two (non)masters. LeCorbusierian functionalism, which he does not completely reject, lacks the specific of place in favour of an internationalist vision and lacks the specific of the individual in favour of a "geometric" vision of the body. But if with Le Corbusier's functionalism "it can be said that man forgot himself, with regard to the achievements of Wright's organicism it can be said that man forgot other men". When Wright died, his lesson was transformed, with his American heirs, into "an endless sea of forms".<sup>108</sup>

### **The Gulbenkian Journey, Reflections: Acropolis**

The stop in Athens is the last on the trip, and Távora makes no secret the excitement of feeling a little at home. It is not simply a matter of physical proximity. Having lunch in a tavern "that could have been Portuguese" (9 June), he launches into consideration, to which he will often return in time, regarding a Mediterraneanness, not strictly geographical, to which he feels he belongs, a southern identity "even though I was born in the North of Portugal because in truth the North of Portugal is South".<sup>109</sup> But the southern and Mediterranean identity that Távora perceives and searches for as the matrix of his project does not contain any myth of romantic naturalness; it rather refers to a "classical sensibility", to a "nostalgia for Greece, Egypt and Rome", to Fernando Pessoa's quoted "Greece, Rome, Christendom, Europe". And it is "something of this Ancient Architecture, a certain classicism, a certain longing for eternity"<sup>110</sup> that Távora goes in search of in his first visit to the Athenian monuments, grasping some of the principles, some of the constants that would underpin his projects over the years.

The lesson of the Acropolis contributes decisively to one of the key themes of Távora's project, namely the relationship between architecture and place, never interpreted as contextualism, never indulging in forms of pretended naturalness, always centred on the clarity of the founding principles of the work, in a courteous, accurate but not surrendering dialogue with the existing.

During the visit to the Acropolis, the process of recognising constants is evident and easily readable in comparison with one of the debut projects, the *Casa sobre*

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107 In a 1988 interview, Távora recalls the enthusiasm for Wright that he felt during the Gulbenkian trip and, in a later interview five years later, he calls it a 'Wrightian passion during an acute crisis of rationalism'. An enthusiasm he does not regain when he returns to visit his works with Siza in 1988. "All interesting", he says, "but not part of my family", "I see them as interesting works by an outsider". (Távora, *Para a Edifícios*, 9). In another interview, this one from 1993, Távora states: "I observed and continue to think that the great rationalists were never rationalists, the great internationalists were never internationalists, an opinion that led me to a certain scepticism in relation to these terminologies that always served to make plastic choices. Having reached this conclusion, even Frank Lloyd Wright went into crisis for me, without my ever ceasing to admire him enormously" (1993 Távora interviewed by Bernardo Pinto, *Boletim da Universidade do Porto*, 19/0, 3/4, p. 47 Out-Nov 1993 now in Távora, *As Raízes e os Frutos palavra desenho obra 1937-2001*, IX).

108 Távora, *Da Organização do Espaço*, 40 ff.

109 Fernando Távora, *Di corpo inteiro*, interview with Rádio Comercial of 17 December 1988 now in Távora, *As Raízes e os Frutos palavra desenho obra 1937-2001*, XLII.

110 Fernando Távora, interview in *Espaços*, 10, I, 2000 now in F. Távora, *As Raízes e os Frutos palavra desenho obra 1937-2001*, XXIV.

o mar (1952), which contains, in nuce, an architectural theme that was later to become decisive in the development of Távora's design career, namely the search for a relationship of continuity between the architectural body and the ground.

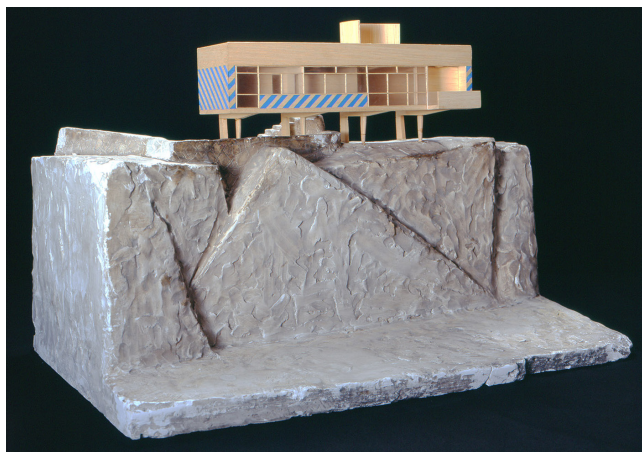
The *House by the Sea* project (Foz, Porto) precedes the Gulbenkian trip by eight years and is the project to obtain the CODA or degree from ESBAP.

The project report of the time echoes the positions expressed by Távora five years earlier in his text on *The problem of the Portuguese house*, rejecting "decorative whimsy" and "archaeological nonsense" while attributing to the architecture he designed "architectural forms" that "derive from the conditions imposed on the material by the function it has to perform" but also "from the spirit of those who act on the material itself", from "a profound reason", "an intimate and constant force that unifies and binds together all forms, making each building a living body, an organism with its own soul and its own language".<sup>111</sup>

In an interview almost fifty years later, the tension between functionalist and organicist references disappears as the sense of the "intimate and constant force that unifies and binds all forms together" becomes clear:

I think of the House by the Sea, my graduation project. Now, if I wanted to trace a biography of that house, I would have to tell the story of an illustrious lady, I would have to retrace my life, I would have to think back to my origins, to the place for which I imagined the house, which is the beach of Senhora da Luz, where there is a lighthouse that already existed in Roman times; there is its profound reason, and it is the same place where my family's house stands today, where I have lived and still live. The project springs and develops from that history, and only through it can one understand how it is not an accident, the school exercise of an architect designing buildings on *pilotis*.<sup>112</sup>

The tension between a "school exercise" of building on *pilotis* and the propensity to make each building belong to the place on which it stands is visible in the drawings. Indeed, these show a parallelepiped body of geometric purity suspended on a structural cage with corbelled pillars that raise the box off the ground. An external staircase on the street front that appears almost without openings leads to the only open floor facing the ocean, with a ribbon window. On the roof, a "gesture" never repeated by Távora in his later projects: a free, curved wall [Fig. 79].



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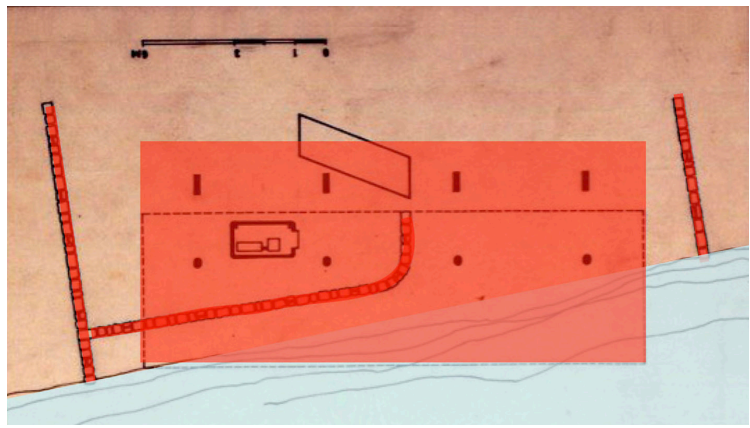
111 The report reads: "Architecture cannot and must not submit to motifs, to more or less curious details, to archaeological nonsense. The authors of these 'Casas à portuguesa' forgot and still forget that the traditional forms of the entire art of building are not a decorative whim or a baroque manifestation. Initially, and here in their true sense, architectural forms derive from the conditions imposed on the material by the function it must perform and the spirit of those who act on the material itself. Thus, in all good architecture, there is a dominant logic, a deep reason in all its parts, an intimate and constant force that unifies and binds together all the forms, making each building a living body, an organism with its own soul and its own language." (Marques da Silva Foundation, Távora Archive).

112 Fernando Távora, *La mia opera*, in: Esposito, Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera completa*, 9-10.

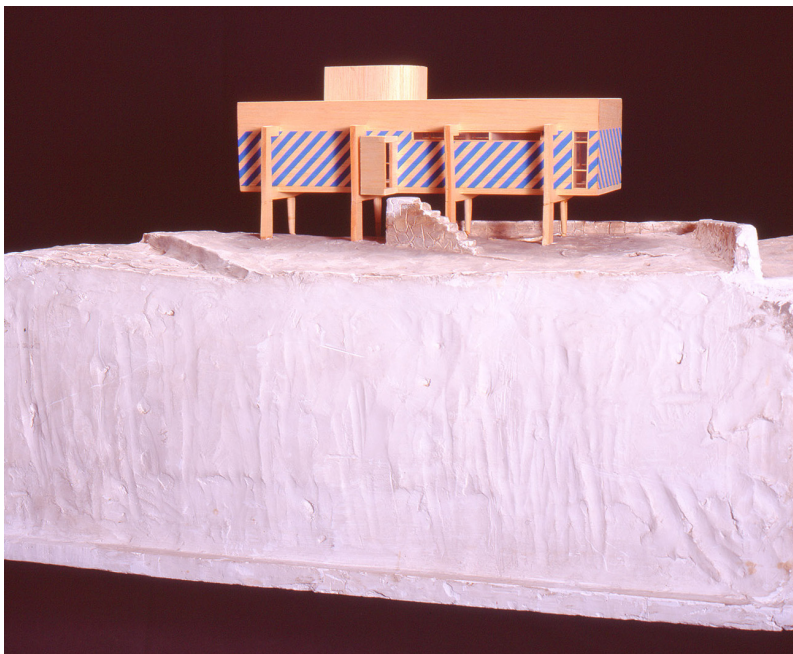
Fig. 79, 81  
Fernando Távora, Casa sobre o mar, Foz, Porto, model (FIMS/AFT).

So far, the school exercise, the attempt at “critical adherence” to the master Le Corbusier. But the drawings contain much more and, again, the journeys feeding the project are more than one.

First of all, the journey across the project site itself, the knowledge and consideration of archaeology, not the “silly” or stylistic one of the “Portuguese style” house, but a precise knowledge of the ruins that the site hosts, an ancient history intertwined with the biography of the author and his family. Then, the consideration of hydrographical and orographic structures, the overlooking of the ocean, and the decision to place the building on the border between water and land are considered [Fig. 80].



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The drawings show how the house’s body is already inscribed in a complex system – house, ruins, rock, water – and how the geographic and non-purist representation of its location expresses an attraction, a desire to make the building descend from the pilotis, experiment with its correct ground support, and create continuity between all the elements.

Then, also inescapable, the “journey across the homeland” with which Távora “contaminates” the LeCorbusierian exercise as it appears in the staircase to the suspended body [Fig. 81, 82].

But the design of the *Casa Sobre o Mar* delineates above all one of the key themes of Távora’s design research, namely the relationship between the building and the ground, and in this respect, the act of recognition that takes place on the occasion of his first visit to the Acropolis is decisive.

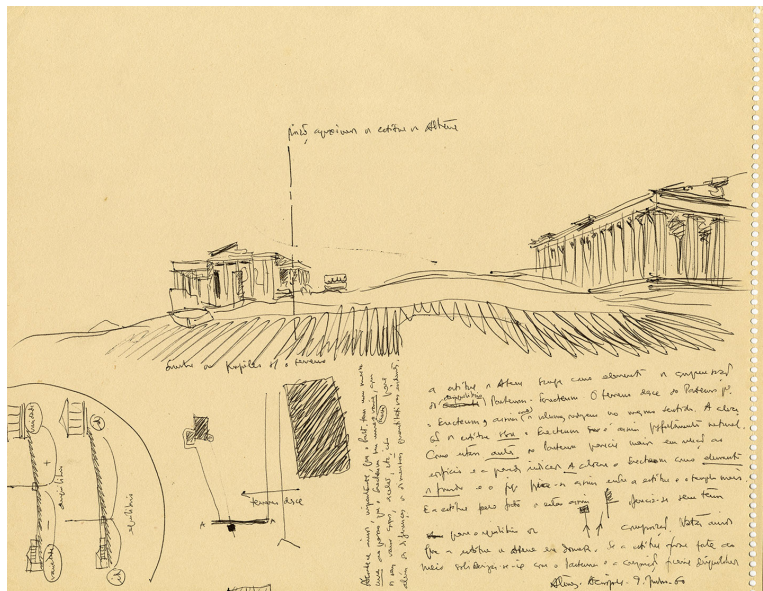
Fig. 80  
Fernando Távora, Casa sobre o mar, Foz, Porto (FIMS/AFT, graphics by the author).

Fig. 82  
*Arquitectura Popolar em Portugal* (Lisboa: Gravura, composição e impressão Gráfica São Gonçalo 1961), 288.

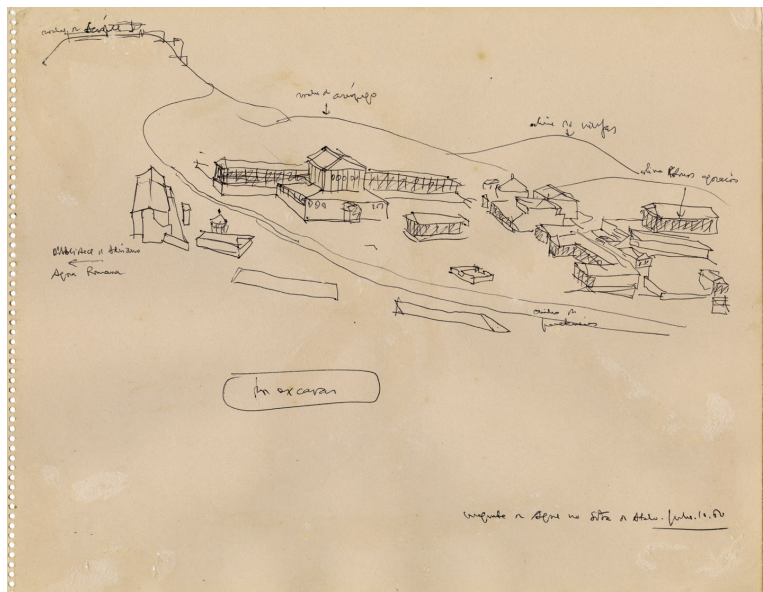


It is important to emphasise that Távora begins his first real-life analysis of the Athenian archaeological complex – a place to which he will return on other trips, unlike Japan – with a visit to the Stoà of Attalus (9 June), immediately returning to the theme of walking as an act of knowledge, reflection and political confrontation. Curious, he writes, “how our civilisation, despite its economic wealth, ignores the need for the Agora in its broadest sense”. Having delineated the political and social background that generated the complex, as in the case of the Japanese temples, the gaze turns geographical. Távora observes, first of all, the orographic and planimetric layout, the “viewpoints”, the “slopes”, walking among the excavations “always with a map in hand to understand better”. The synthesis of this geographical observation is entrusted to three drawings. The first (*Notebook B*, no. 14, 9 June) is dedicated to the relationships between the different elements of the complex, to the “variety” that derives from the relationship between “unity” and “balance/disbalance” of the individual components, the “single mass” of the Parthenon and the “composite mass” of the Erechtheion, the quantitative differences between the two bodies, the rebalancing elements such as the statue of Athena, all in the perceptive and dynamic interpretation that he would theorise about two years later in his text *On the Organisation of Space* and that add an original and decisive element to his conception of the “classical”.

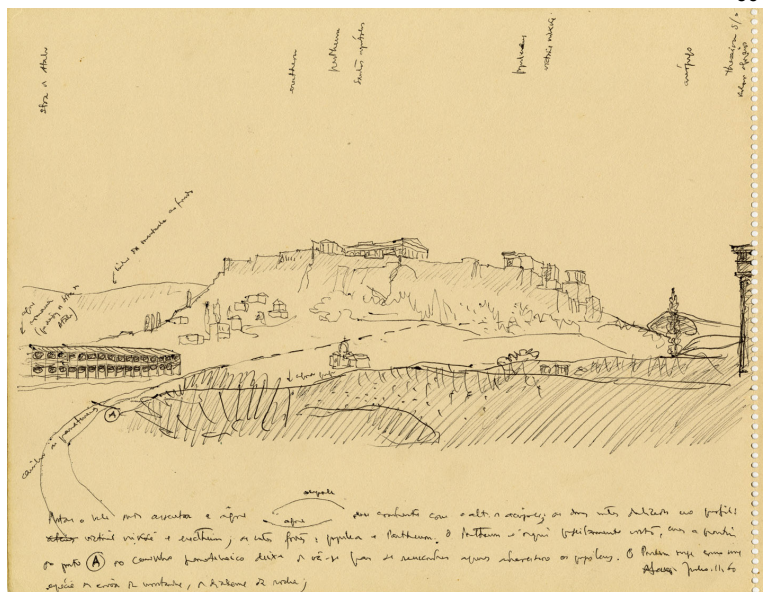
In the *View of the Acropolis from the North* (*Notebook B*, no. 20, 11 June), the synthesis becomes broader on a geographical scale. Távora depicts the relationships between the different architectural elements. These routes connect them, the framing in the landscape, emphasising the contrast between “the valley where



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the Agora rests” and “the height of the Acropolis”, the role of each element in the overall pattern – “the two delicate notes in the profile: Nike Victory and the Erechtheion; the strong notes Propylaeum and Parthenon”. A “landscape” that, amazed and delighted, he sees transformed by the light of a full moon when (10 June) he returns for an evening visit [Fig. 83, 84, 85, 86].



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Fundamental to the overall vision of the drawing now described is the perception of the “Parthenon... as a kind of mountain crown, a diadem of rock”. It is a decisive architectural theme, a recurring lesson in many of his projects, already grasped in an earlier drawing (*Notebook B*, no. 13, 9 June): “the composition” structured “on three levels – natural terrain with its characteristics (textures, concavity, movement, vegetation); supporting walls – of more or less coarse stone, with elements that create platforms and transitions of values; buildings – creating profiles, play, quality, prestige of the sacred place / (marble, elegance of detail, generous play of light and shadow)”.

Having grasped the geographical value of the whole, the gaze becomes closer.

Redesigning, on the same day, the *Athena Varvakeion* (*Notebook B*, no. 19, 11 June) and recalling its original location within the temple, he grasps another character of the Parthenon that structurally enters into Távora’s project, namely a “double scale” of the building, a “great sculpture” that participates, together with the “sacred rocky peak”, in the shaping of the landscape on the one hand, and on the other the “sacred, closed, mysterious interior space, organised with the intention of giving all the dignity and grandeur to a figure”. Two different spatialities, both of a relational nature – the presence of the building in relation to the place and the interior in relation to the statue – but, above all, the recognition – bluntly anti-modernist – of a distinct spatial quality of the interior in relation to the exterior. A decisive distinction for Távora’s research on intermediate spaces and on continuity of architectural space based not on the dematerialisation of the envelope but on the articulation, connection, and characterisation

Fig. 83

Fernando Távora, Acropolis, Athens, 9 June 1960, from the *Diário de “bordo”* (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 84

Fernando Távora, Model of the Agora, 10 June 1960, from the *Diário de “bordo”* (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 85

Fernando Távora, View of the Acropolis from the North, 11 June 1960, from the *Diário de “bordo”* (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 86

Fernando Távora, Acropolis of Athens, 9 June 1960 from the *Diário de “bordo”* and F. Távora, *House Above the Sea*, perspective (FIMS/AFT, graphics by the author).

of the interior, intermediate and exterior spaces. A plastic continuity, combining matter and void that is quite different from the modernist dream of the infinite and indefinite open space.

Finally, the constructive lesson, which Távora does not entrust to detailed drawings as he had done, for example, in Baalbek a few days earlier – perhaps because he was aware that he was dealing with largely reconstructed architecture – rather offers an opportunity for methodological considerations.

Again, the first was internal and structural to his conception of architecture. The consideration moves from the Theseion, built as “a kind of model for its almost parallel construction, to be able to verify measurements, dimensions” (9 June). An observation that leads him to reiterate his conviction that “only *by doing the same thing several times, over a lifetime or generations, is it possible to refine and achieve eternal solutions*”. Again, this is a radical critique of the idea of architectural creativity as a compulsion to invent ever-new forms. A critique of the “consumerism” of form, a theme to which he also often returns in the Diary and which here offers him the occasion for yet another critique of the American technocratic economy according to which you are “obliged” to “change model, whatever it costs and whether or not there are fundamental motivations for doing so”.

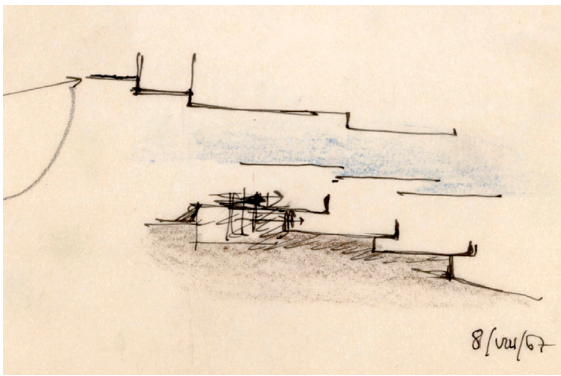
The process that strikes him in ancient Greek architectural culture is instead an “accumulation of experience” – which he also observes on a figurative level in ceramics, “whose motifs developed not over a lifetime but over generations” – and which also becomes a question of language in architecture because the Greeks.

They used the same language many times over a period of one hundred, two hundred, and three hundred years. They made the Parthenon on the right side and then rebuilt it on the left side. They took it apart and rebuilt it, the current one, not on the same foundations but in the same place. All this took place with the greatest speed and decision, because it depended on political events. The construction site had its own boss and a series of artists and everything worked with formidable speed.

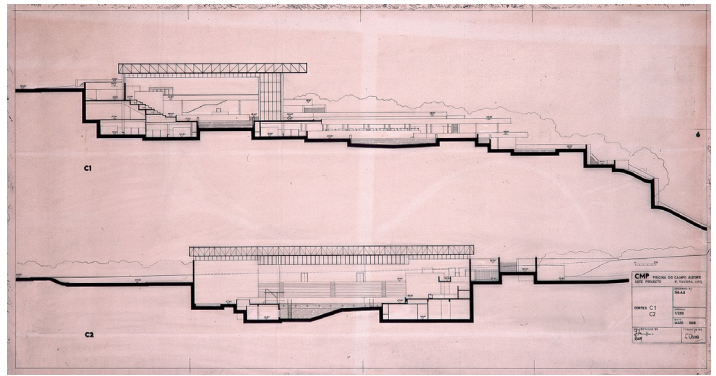
And in his enthusiasm for this language that is not tied to the individual personality but collective and transgenerational, closely connected to political life and the permanence of building techniques, a compliment, and not an insignificant one, to Mies van der Rohe, combined with a personal programmatic position supported by a philosophical reference to that date very much present in his reflections, escapes him.

From the Theseion to the Parthenon there is a whole evolutionary journey, as happens with the Lake Shore 1a and 2a phase of Mies. In general, nowadays, this growth of experience – see what Abel Salazar says in *Philosophy of Art* – is very limited, because the pace of life forces a constant variation of techniques, programmes, etc., and also because people as well as societies think it is shameful to repeat themselves.





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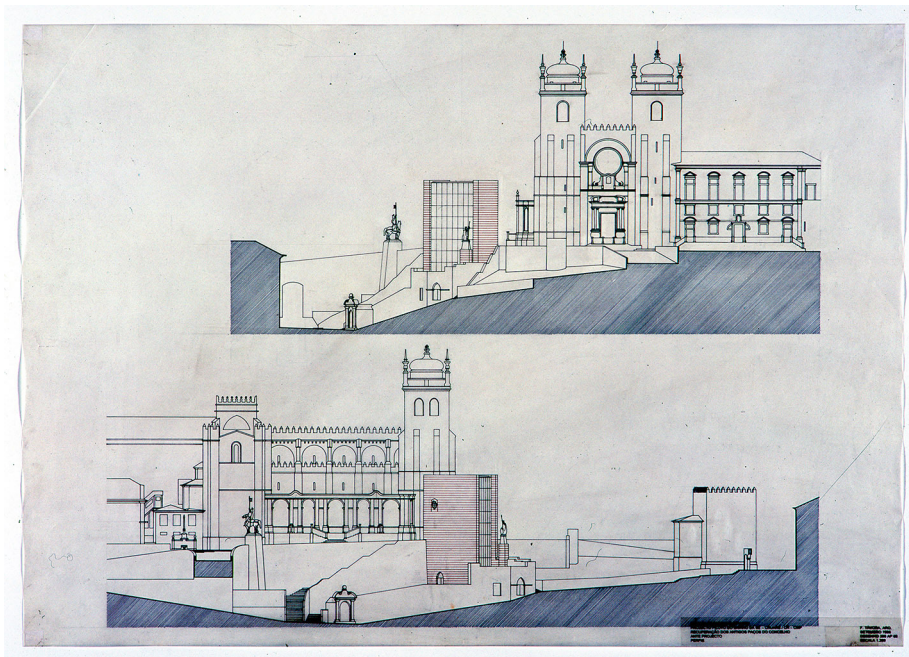
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In other projects, the exercise of altimetric placement of a new building in a non-sub alternative and non-contextualist logic of continuity and integration appears decisive with respect to the confrontation with important architectural pre-existences.

Thus in the transformation into a pousada of the Convent of Santa Marinha da Costa (Guimarães, 1972-1985), so in the masterly reading of the city through a small architectural work offered with the aforementioned House of the Twenty-Four (1995) next to the Porto Cathedral [Fig. 91, 92].



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Fig. 89, 90  
Fernando Távora, Porto, project for a swimming pool, Campo Alegre, 1967, concept sketch and section (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 91  
Fernando Távora, Project for the conversion of the Santa Marinha da Costa Convent into a pousada, Guimarães, 1972-85, sketch (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 92  
Fernando Távora, House of the Twenty-Four, Porto (FIMS/AFT).

But the project that shows, fully resolved, the themes raised by the *Casa sobre o mar* with an almost literal reference to the constants observed in Athens is the realisation of the *Aula Magna of the Faculty of Law* grafted into the university “acropolis” of Coimbra (1993-2000).

The project programme is simple – the construction of a new *Aula Magna* capable of accommodating 450 seats – of extraordinary complexity is the planned location of the new architecture. The building fits into the heart of the university citadel of Coimbra, whose history began when D. João III ceded the Royal Palace to the University. The Palace stands on top of a rise within the Arab medina, and the new institutional settlement develops around the *Paço das Escolas*, with the addition of buildings along a secular chronology. As Gonçalo Byrne observes in an illuminating note on the work:

... the hill was occupied in an extremely organic manner, constructing the buildings directly on the sloping ground, avoiding the construction of large terraces or platforms where buildings and groups of houses could be placed. The Arab layout is built directly on the land, the orography of which remains visible in the roadways and small sloping squares that deviate little from the natural conformation. The retaining walls have a visibly autonomous development and almost always reproduce the contour and plan of the building, which seeks direct support from the ground regardless of the elevation at which it meets it. The ‘buttress buildings’, with their more or less cubic form, sit directly on the hill, transforming its natural configuration into a sort of cubic crystallisation: an encrustation of reliefs (the buildings) and empty spaces (squares, calli, patios, etc.). The aggregate built around the *Paço das Escolas*, where the new Amphitheatre of Law fits in, was constructed in exactly that way. The peripheral buildings, from the Joanina Chapel to the Via Latina complex, rest directly on the ground as large buttresses of the central platform, an idea clearly assimilated by Fernando Távora’s project.<sup>113</sup> [Fig. 93]



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On the land entrusted to Távora, behind the Library, in a void created by the gap between the Joanina Chapel and the Faculty of Law, there are also the ruins of a Manueline arcade, five arches running parallel to the front of the historical buildings, closed by two orthogonal arches [Fig. 94, 95, 96].

A series of initial sketches shows the making of the project, the understanding of the site in its abandonment, the presence of the Manulean ruins to be included, the relationship with the existing monumental complex, the facing

113 Gonçalo Byrne, “Da Aula Magna a lezione magistrale”, *Casabella*, no. 693, (2001): 55.

Fig. 93  
Coimbra University Citadel  
(Google Earth).



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towards the Mondego river that somehow imposes the responsibility of defining a new prospect of the citadel towards the city. The sketches are the result of walking, of the cognitive wandering in the place that, as mentioned, is the foundation of Távora's project.

In addition to this, not visible in the drawings but pointed out by Távora in the report, there is "the layout of a Roman road and the remains of the structure of a wall from around the same period", with which the foundation work will impact.

But the key decision of the project, which is also clearly visible in the first study sketches, consists in a choice of an elevational nature, in the decision regarding the location of the building so that it can be added to the historic complex without arrogance and, at the same time, assert its new presence without awe.

Távora resorts to the cherished theme of an "art of sitting" to explain his choice.

There are different ways of sitting that characterise different civilisations; the Japanese sit one way, the Indians another, and the animals each have their way. It is important to understand how a building sits on the ground and, in this way, takes possession of it, and places itself permanently on it. In the design for the amphitheatre in Coimbra, I tried to show the delicacy with which the building is rooted in the ground, to then project outwards with horizontal planes and upwards with small volumes.<sup>114</sup>

Fig. 94

Fernando Távora, Aula Magna of the Faculty of Law, Coimbra, sketch (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 95, 96

Fernando Távora, Aula Magna of the Faculty of Law, manual remains during the early stages of construction (photo by the author).

Fig. 97

Fernando Távora, Aula Magna of the Faculty of Law, Coimbra, study sketch (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 98

Fernando Távora, Acropolis of Athens, 6 June 1960, from the *Diário de "bordo"* (FIMS/AFT).

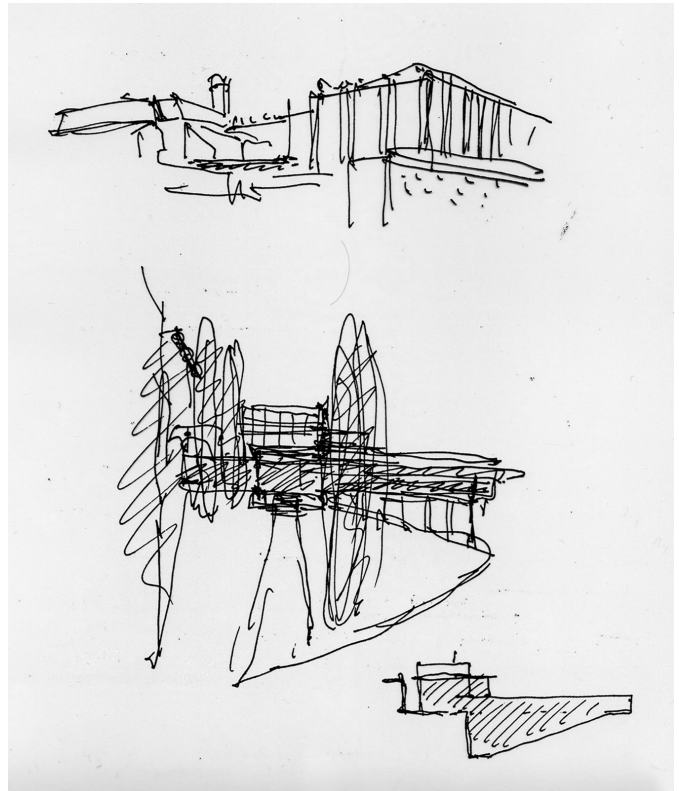
114 Giovanni Leoni, "Távora e la conoscenza dello spazio", *Casabella*, no. 693 (October 2001): 46-57.

An 'art of sitting' that is often the focus of his attention during his various travels.

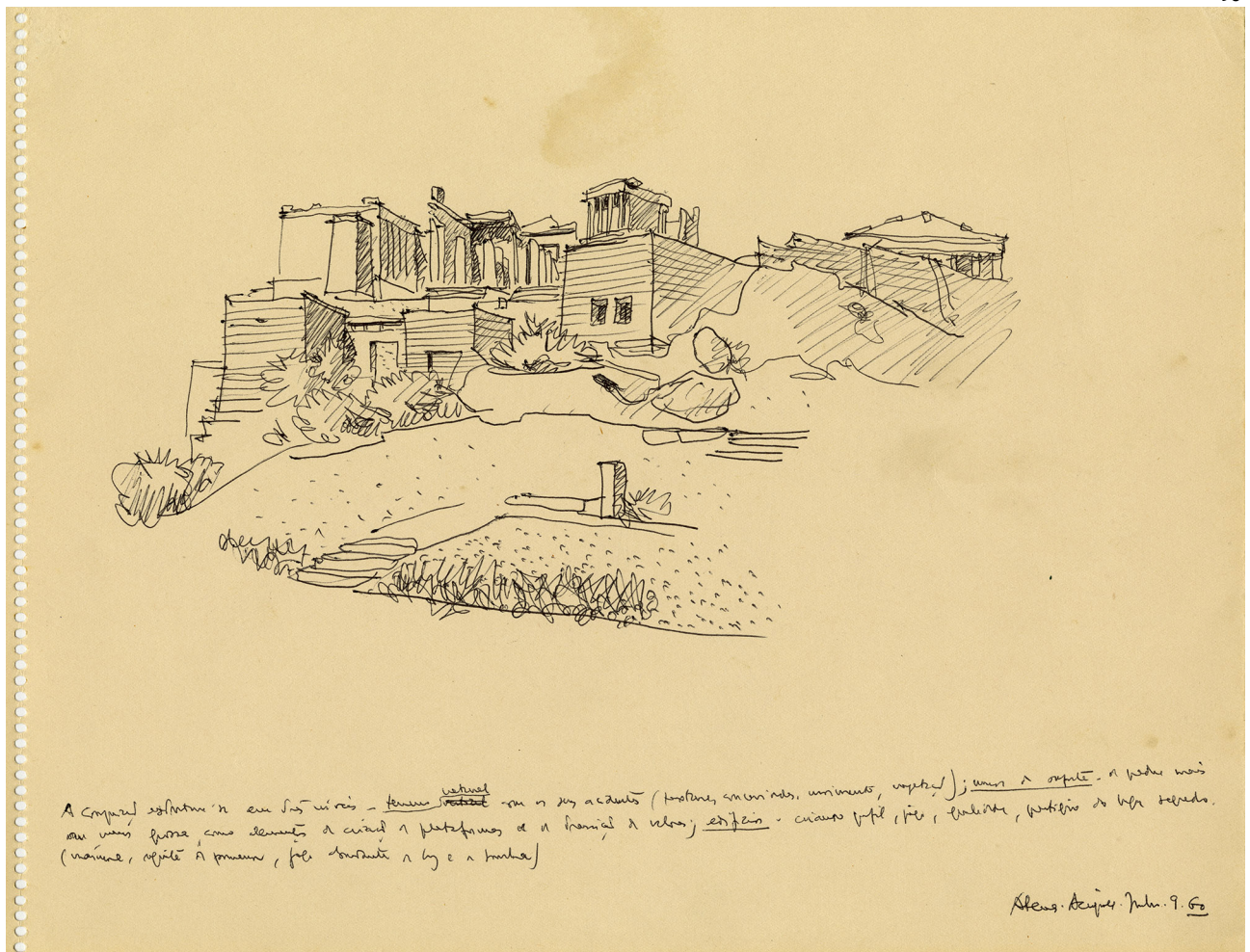
The tension felt in the *House by the Sea*, the programme to bring the building down from the abstraction of the pilotis to the complexity of the ground by constructing a continuity – spatial and cultural – between building and place, finds a full and crystalline realisation here [Fig. 95, 96].

The proper placement of the Aula Magna on the ground has significant consequences.

The thirty-by-thirty metre body, with an extremely simple planimetric layout – an "archetype" that "amounts to a masterly lesson in architecture", as Byrne defines it in the note mentioned above – manages to be, at the same time, an ideal continuation of the Paço das Escolas, offering a new surface to the pre-existing monumental complex, but also a new monumental element that, with eight stone buttresses, peremptorily affirms its belonging to the university "acropolis" [Fig. 97, 98].

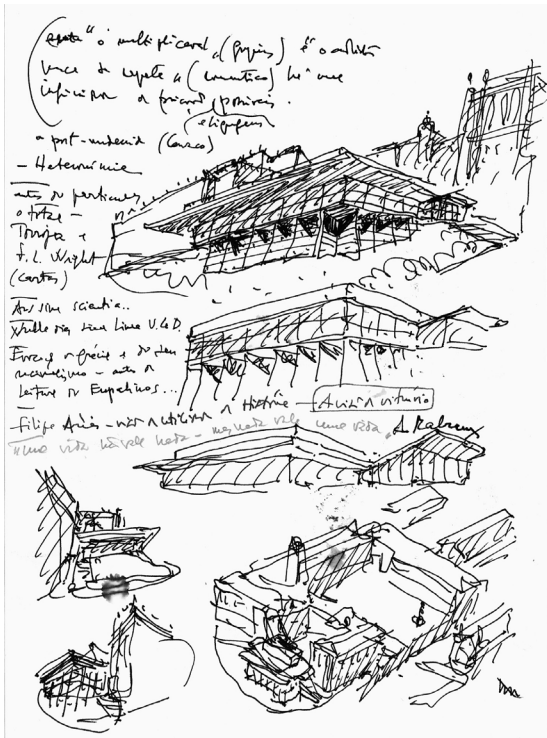


97



98



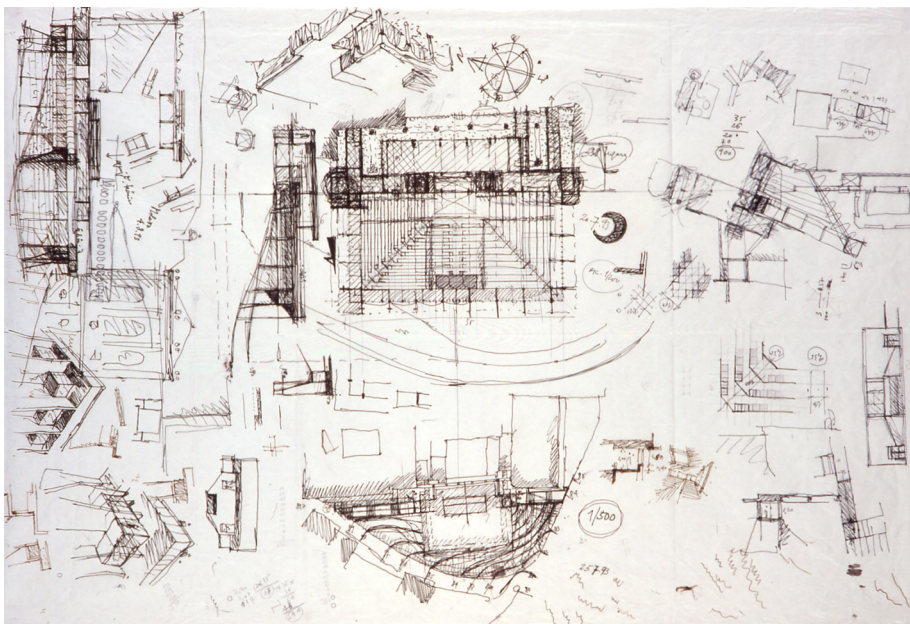


99 100



However, the building's descent to the ground is not a design choice like others; it implies a mutation that could be described as ontological. Here, the suspended architectural volume of the *House by the Sea*, devoid of constraints, endowed with an order of its own generated and controlled by geometry, is transformed, as it descends to the ground, into a solid-aerial compound that absorbs and reorganises lines of energy, both material and immaterial, already present in the place. A compound that encompasses not only the physical elements but also the temporal dimension and the "life content" that the place potentially contains [Fig. 99].

The system of relations that the building gathers, or rather, with which the building is composed, addresses, on the one hand, the Faculty of Law.



101 |

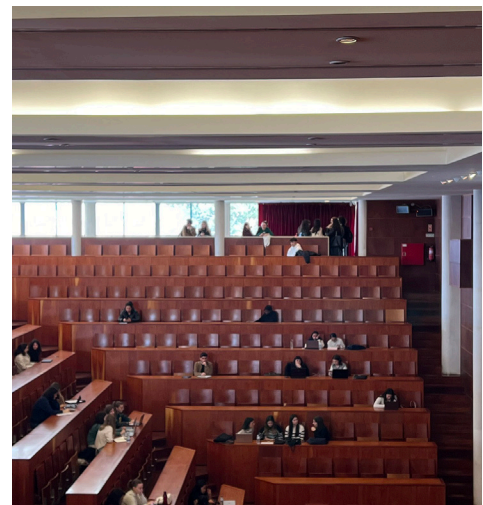
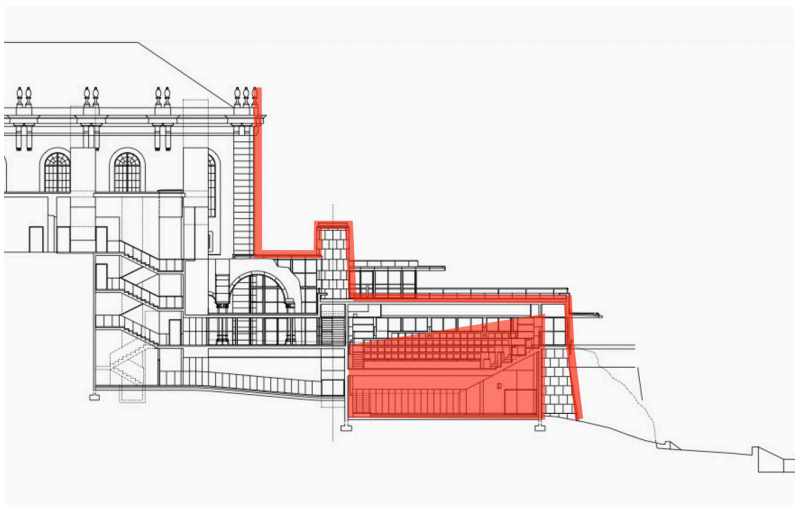
Fig. 99  
Fernando Távora, Great Hall of the Faculty of Law, Coimbra, overall study sketch of the project in relation to the university citadel (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 100  
Fernando Távora, F. Távora, Great Hall of the Faculty of Law, Coimbra (photo by the author).

Fig. 101  
Fernando Távora, Aula Magna of the Faculty of Law, Coimbra, study sketches showing relations with the university citadel (FIMS/AFT).

With a choice that is certainly not taken for granted, Távora turns the cavea not towards the main elevation, thus facing the river, but towards the university nucleus. Hence, the oxymoron of a main elevation that is, in reality, the back of the hall dictated by the intention to make the chair, a symbol of institutional activity, fully belong to the university complex towards which the academic community turns. But even those sitting at the chair have no view outside except for a strip of the sky thanks to a long ribbon window that, behind the cavea, embraces the entire Aula.

Observing the sections, one grasps the heteronymic exercise to which Távora subjects the small building: a prominent platform, a clearly marked monument, an “underground” volume that becomes part of the citadel’s orographic configuration [Fig. 100, 101].



The transformation of architecture from a suspended and isolated object, as it still was in the *Casa sobre o mar*, to a system of relations thus intertwines other central themes of the Tavorian project already mentioned above.

Firstly, the conception of the project as a cognitive crossing of the place.

In Coimbra, the routeing system offers a concrete and timely example of the Távora’s idea of continuity.

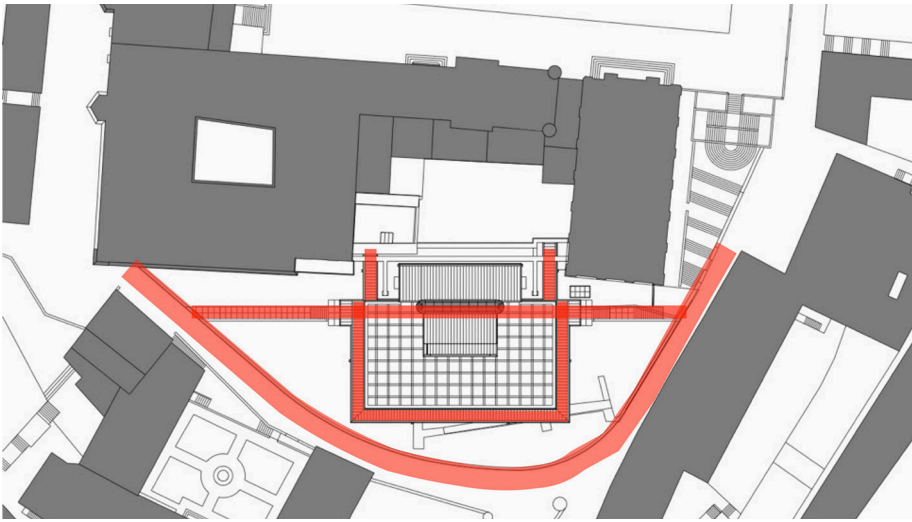
In fact, the path that embraces the Aula at the top of the cavea continues at the points where it meets the pre-existing buildings, physically and functionally connecting the Aula with the Library on the one hand and the Law School on the other.

This path is crossed, at the level of the cathedra, by another passage tangent to the cathedra, which extends outwards on both sides, overcoming the unevenness of the terrain and connecting with the existing road system.

Only a visit to the work fully restores how the system of relations now described is the result of a project that is based not on the abstraction of drawing but on the experience of repeatedly crossing the place, a crossing that generates an ever-deeper knowledge, naturally supported by cognitive investigations, also conducted through drawing.

Fig. 102  
Fernando Távora, Aula Magna of the Faculty of Law, Coimbra, section (FIMS/AFT, graphics by the author).

Fig. 103  
Fernando Távora, Aula Magna of the Faculty of Law, Coimbra, interior (photo by the author).



104|



105|



106|

Fig. 102  
Fernando Távora, Aula Magna  
of the Faculty of Law, Coimbra,  
floor plan (FIMS/AFT, graphics  
by the author).

Fig. 103, 104  
Fernando Távora, Aula Magna  
of the Faculty of Law, Coimbra  
(photo by the author).

The transformation of the “journey”, of the conscious and reflective crossing, into a project, subtle but already present in a work such as the *Park in the Quinta da Conceição*, here becomes generative of a new architecture but entirely determined by a physical action of an interpretative nature [Fig. 104, 105, 106, 107, 108].

As in the case of the *Quinta*, evident there in the relationship between *Park* and *Pavilion*, the completion of a project based on bodily experience is a rigorous constructive knowledge bridging existing and new construction.

In this regard, the theme of the grid, of the module, returns, but it should be understood not as a foundational and normative instrument but rather as an interpretative tool.

Távora identifies in the Manueline remains a module of fifty-five centimetres and applies it as a generative measure and organising criterion for the entire new building, from the overall proportions of the spaces to the dimensions of the doors to the size of the seats. A relationship of continuity in the large glazed atrium that introduces the hall is an evident scene, in a balance between rigour and freedom that,

as mentioned, is one of the values recognised in the Japanese “law of the tatami”.



107



108|

Fig. 105, 106  
Fernando Távora, Aula Magna  
of the Faculty of Law, Coimbra  
(photo by the author).

## The Gulbenkian Journey, Reflections: Mies

Távora's encounter with Mies van der Rohe during the Gulbenkian trip is twofold.

The visit to the IIT, no longer directed by the German master for two years but still strongly marked by his presence, is part of the institutional programme to study US innovations in the teaching of architecture and urban planning.

But within the framework of the substantial disinterest that the *Diary* testifies to for the American architecture of those years and for the American outcomes of pre-war European Modernism, there is also, relevantly, the encounter with some works by Mies. This encounter is not ideological but phenomenological, resulting in a judgement that is more positive than negative, with, however, significant shadows.

Távora puts, between himself and his interest in Mies, the usual blasé attitude with which he makes it clear, without ever stating it explicitly, that it is not a journey in the footsteps of the modernist masters. Besides, as we have seen, even the approach to Wright, far more ideological and prepared, takes place in a transversal form and with a series of expedients aimed at not turning the visit to Taliesin into a "museum" visit.

On 29 February, his first day in New York, Távora is having lunch and, consulting the city map, notices that he is near the Lever House and the Seagram, so he decides to visit them. The Seagram immediately appears to him "impressive for its nobility, its presence, its dignity", the Lever House 'already more decorative'. The judgement is set. Mies is exempt from the main defect that Távora would attribute as much to the masters transplanted to the USA as to their pupils or followers: "decorative", a "pleasing Americanism" that is "a skilful synthesis of decoration and technique". The observation then becomes more precise and concerns constructive aspects. After all, he had already noted in his youthful diaries his own hesitation between Wright and Mies, describing Portuguese sobriety as "impossible in material (form) - but possible in technique"<sup>115</sup>. Távora's analysis in situ is subtle and emphasises how the two buildings, substantially coeval, constructed "with practically the same technologies", with such similar "plastic" intentions, offer such a different outcome. The Lever House is "at best pleasing" while the Seagram "speaks" in the same way that some Greek temples "speak", and others do not, according to Paul Valéry, an author who – if we extend the quotation by Távora – attributes this gift "to the talent of their builders".<sup>116</sup> His is therefore not the reading of an American Mies reconverted to "classicist" forms that Távora could, at that date, have already borrowed from Zevi's *History of Modern Architecture*; rather, it is the recognition of Mies's belonging to the Great Tradition of constructive

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115 Távora, *As Raízes e os Frutos*, 44.

116 "Dis-moi (puisque tu es si sensible aux effets de l'architecture), n'as-tu pas observé, en te promenant dans cette ville, que d'entre les édifices dont elle est peuplée, les uns sont muets ; les autres parlent ; et d'autres enfin, qui sont les plus rares, chantent ? - Ce n'est pas leur destination, ni même leur figure générale, qui les animent à ce point, ou qui les réduisent au silence. Cela tient au talent de leur constructeur, ou bien à la faveur des Muses." See: Paul Valéry, *Eupalinos ou l'architecte*, in *Architectures*, recueil publié sous la direction de Louis Süe & André Mare, Paris: Éditions du Sagittaire, 1921): 17.

constants, as revealed by a conclusive and unexpected observation in the *Diary*, triggered not by a visit to a Miesian work but by a reflection elaborated while observing the Acropolis (9 June) as mentioned above. An observation, like few others in the *Diary*, internal to his own design work, which he closes by comparing this progressive “growth of experience” to Mies’s work for the Lake Shore Drive buildings in Chicago, which he visited with admiration on 20 April: “it seems almost impossible the degree of elegance that could be achieved with simple steel profiles!”.

On 9 March, chatting with Mario Salvadori fresh from a second visit to Mies’s New York opera, the comparison between the Lever House - “a ballerina” - and the Seagram - “a great lady” - the latter now described in material detail, returns, even more starkly. “It is difficult to reach such a level with so much sobriety,” Távora notes, evoking one of the themes that most often return in his training, sobriety in fact, usually referred to Le Corbusier for the contemporary but sought above all in medieval and specifically Cistercian models.

In the face of Távora’s appreciation of Mies’s architecture, as he had the opportunity to observe and analyse it in person, his objection to the German master’s role in the United States is, one might say, exquisitely political, even if the visit to Detroit, particularly unfortunate in relation to the quality of the architecture observed, wrenches from him a strictly disciplinary comment: “poor Mies and poor Le Corbusier have architected so much and created so much beauty that they don’t deserve this kind of grandchildren, bastards, everywhere! What a pity”.

The “political” attack on Mies takes place on the Crown Hall stage between 12 and 13 April. On this occasion, too, Távora describes a “chance” encounter with what Mies “considers to be one of his major works”. On 11 April, he wanders around the IIT Campus looking for the “*Department of Architecture*” that no one seems to know anything about. He finally heads for “a building that seemed to stand out from the whole, and luckily, it was exactly what I was looking for”. The purpose of the visit was an appointment with George Danforth, a pupil of Mies and his fresh successor as head of the school. The meeting is postponed, and Távora notes a not encouraging: “I didn’t want to stay or see any more Mies”. The next day Danforth is present but busy with others and Távora “to pass the time” wanders around Crown Hall, offering an aseptic description of it from which he seems to appreciate above all the dimension of a “democratic” collective space: “A kind of public square where everyone gathers, everyone knows each other and no one hides”, a place where “life proceeds well”. The building is then “impeccable in its proportions and exactness”. He is disappointed, however, by the overall visit to the Campus and, in particular, the Chapel, which “possesses the scientific, rational and comforting air of the great majority of American religions”.

But the most radical critique takes its cue from observing the students’ work, and not only because they were more copied than inspired by Mies (and Hilberseimer for the urban planning projects) to delineate a ‘Germanic school’ on American soil.

While attending the design reviews conducted by Danforth, with a casualness that may leave some doubt, Távora points his attention to the work of two students, one Chinese and one Indian. He has no particular objection to the quality of the projects but observes that “if the poor Indian goes to do that kind of stuff in India, in the heat, with no money and no technique, he will definitely be liquidated”.

Távora’s main objection to Mies’s work, at least to its American phase, thus consists in having placed his constructive skill at the service of the indifference to the specific that is characteristic of American culture; indifference if not technocratic imperialist arrogance. It is no coincidence that, on the day following the review, he again meets the two students from China and India, finds them pleased to have Mies “as a source of inspiration” and is negatively struck by their inability to ask themselves questions, especially a question that, as we have already mentioned, appears decisive to him well before the trip, namely the “Mies-Wright contrast”, to which he dedicates, on the same day (13 April), a note already quoted above.

Both the ‘political’ objection to Mies, which we could summarise as a vindication of his own cosmopolitan vision with respect to an internationalist drift of Miesian scholasticism, and the sequence of opposites with which he structures the note by attributing them in parallel form to the two architects, are illuminated when read in parallel with two fundamental texts published by Távora in the early 1950s: *Architecture and Urbanism. The lesson of constants* (1952) and *For a harmony of our space* (1954-1955).

The first text contains a concise but perfectly delineated definition of the project as a cosmopolitan practice.

Wherever there is man, at any time, in any place, there is architecture and urbanism. A necessary phenomenon, inherent to man’s very nature, an indispensable extension of his life, a manifestation of his existence; the variety, the infinity of aspects, and the plurality of realisations are inherent to this universality. Each physical or spiritual climate corresponds to its own solution; the result is an immense panorama that the reading of the past offers to our eyes and that the present itself does not conceal: infinite construction methods, innumerable plastic subtleties, various programmes, the strangest materials, always and everywhere the unprecedented, the different, the unexpected.<sup>117</sup>

A cosmopolitan vision that implies a broadening of the project’s field of action – of its themes, actors and competencies – already described here as a new task with respect to architecture, i.e. an action of “organisation of space”.

The second text, which, even more explicitly, is not intended to be a theoretical text but a concrete action programme for the development of post-conflict Portugal, focuses instead on the balance of opposing aspects that architecture must undergo.

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117 Távora, *Arquitectura e urbanismo. A lição das constantes*, 292.

Any form, road, dam, house, painting, any organising element of space has at least two aspects: a quantitative, objective, invariable aspect, and a qualitative, subjective, variable aspect; in a word: a technical aspect – the process of realisation; and an artistic aspect – the plastic value of the realisation.<sup>118</sup>

A coexistence of contrasting forces, an unstable balance between ‘technical’ and “plastic” that already clearly outlines the opposing coexistence of personality and anonymity and the need to conceive the architectural work as a balancing act between the necessary and the possible, the objective and the subjective.

The hastily written note in the impeccable but corrupting spaces of Crown Hall – to be read in parallel with the emotionally thrilling but ultimately equally liquidating view at Taliesin East – shows Mies and Wright as supreme representatives of the two force fields that in the project of spatial organisation necessarily fight each other. Supreme examples but one and the other, no longer useful, no longer able to cope with the chaos of contemporaneity which, in the two cited texts strongly conditioned by 19th-century architectural literature, Távora still wants to convert into a “harmonic space” but which, also thanks to the Gulbenkian trip, will become – having abandoned any hypothesis of redemption – the field of action, the raw material of his project.

On 15 April Távora visited the *Form givers at mid-century* exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago and found them united as masters, indeed, of form, Wright “with a sumptuous air”, Mies, without comment:

Works... always the same... for a change. It is better to consult the catalogue. I’m fed up with architecture... and architects.

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118 Fernando Távora, “Para a harmonia do nosso espaço”, *Comércio do Porto*, 10 de Agosto de 1954, 8 de Março de 1955.



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