Paula Abrunhosa

Dialogues with Memory and Time: A Contribution by the Marques da Silva Foundation for the Promotion of Fernando Távora's Archive

Exhibition, Travel Drawings, Architecture, Archive, Fernando Távora

/Abstract

Travels were imperative for Fernando Távora. Drawing was the most esteemed tool for analysing and understanding what he had the opportunity to see whenever he "jumped borders". During the month of September 2022, a substantial set of Távora's journey drawings, archived today at the Marques da Silva Foundation, travelled from Porto to Italy. It was the subject and the objective of an exhibition, I viaggi di Fernando Távora (Cesena, from 23 September to 12 December), promoted by the Architecture Department of Bologna University in a cooperation with the Foundation. The opening event, as requested by the curators - Antonio Esposito, Francesco Saverio Fera, Giovanni Leoni and Giorgio Liverani - included a presentation speech dedicated to the Margues da Silva Foundation and its activities for the valorisation of Fernando Távora's archive since 2011, when this Foundation took on the challenge of ensuring its conservation, study and diffusion. The speech pronounced on that occasion was an answer to both the request of the curators and the peculiarity of the circumstances: an exhibition focused on a very specific production by a single author and an event - the presentation and the exhibition opening - addressed to a heterogeneous public, composed of both architects and non-architects, having mostly a first contact with Fernando Távora's work and with Marques da Silva Foundation itself. This contribution, although deprived of the voice and of the images it was originally complemented by, is the transcription of that communication. It also represents a state of an in-progress journey, to which new meanings and new comprehension of the relevance of this fundamental archive are continuously added in

/Author

Paula Abrunhosa Communication and Production Advisor at Marques da Silva Foundation

Paula Abrunhosa (1964) is graduated in Humanities by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of University of Porto and obtained her Master Degree in Musical Sciences at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of University of Coimbra. Having been in charge of the artistic coordination of the Orquestra Nacional do Porto, in 2008 she began the collaboration with Instituto Arquitecto Marques da Silva.

Since 2009, she integrated the newly created Fundação Marques da Silva as Communication and Production Advisor. She was author and presenter of the national radio channel Antena 2 program Arte de Música

At the Fundação Marques da Silva, she's also author and presenter of the podcast series: *Escritos Escolhidos and Passa-a-Palavra: falemos de arquitetura*. She's coordinating several publications at the same entity and she is the translator of the architectural books *Poética Urbana: a cidade da palavra literária*, by Marta Llorente, and *Do projeto clássico à memória da ordem*, by José Ignacio Linazaso-ro



The real art is finding the exact point of contact between things and our interpretation of them.

Álvaro de Campos

I'm not in a hurry: the sun and the moon aren't in a hurry.

No-one walks more quickly than their legs.

If where I want to be is far away, I'm not there in a moment.

Alberto Caeiro¹

1. About the context

I would like to begin by saying thank you for the invitation to this session addressed to the Marques da Silva Foundation, which I represent here today, and by acknowledging the perseverance of those who never gave up believing it was possible to organize this first exhibition of Fernando Távora's travel drawings in Italy. That's why I would like to direct my first words of gratitude to Professors Fabrizio Apollonio (Director of the Department of Architecture of the University of Bologna) and Elena Mucelli (Coordinator of the Master Degree in Architecture of the same University); to the team of Galleria del



Ridotto and to all who collaborated in this project and showed their commitment in leading this challenge to success. But I also want to address my thanks to the exhibition curators, Professors Giovanni Leoni, Giorgio Liverani and especially to Antonio Esposito and Francesco Saverio Fera (our counterparts in the process of preparation of this project). It is important to highlight that Antonio Esposito and Giovanni Leoni, since the publication by Electa of the monograph Fernando Távora. Opera completa, have been making a substantial and major contribution to the promotion and international acknowledgement of "our" achitect's work. It is also important to remember that through the exhibition that opens today and the publication of the Italian translation of the journal of Távora's 1960 travel to the United States and Japan² that Esposito and Leoni are preparing along with Raffaella Maddalluno, they keep animating and diffusing the debate and reflection about one of the most important leading figures of Portuguese architecture of the 20th century and about his work – both designed, drawn and written.

I viaggi di Fernando Távora, exhibition view. Galleria del Ridotto, Cesena, 2022 (© Paula Abrunhosa).

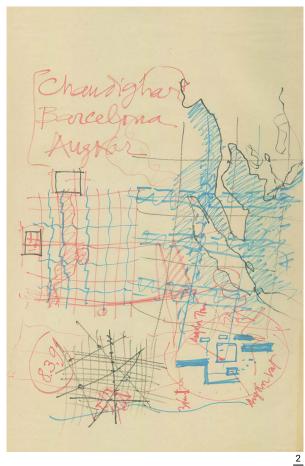
^{*} This presentation was translated to English by Architect Francesco Cancelliere.

¹ Quotes and Távora's poem translated by Gil Stoker..

² Diario di Bordo [Logbook], with opening texts by the translators, was launched in this exhibition framework, in Biblioteca Malatestiana, on November, 22nd, 2022. The book was published by Letteraventidue, with both Fernando Távora's Family and Marques da Silva Foundation support.

2. About Form and Matter

The exhibition I viaggi di Fernando Távora provided the opportunity of showing again this set of original drawings. An exhibition project is always surrounded by countless variables that support and frame it, but the singularity of the exhibition act determines, as a consequence, a unique experience of observation, enjoyment and appropriation of what we are allowed to see. It represents, without any doubt, a peculiar and irreplaceable kind of apprehension, distinct from the one allowed by archival research or by any kind of reproduction, either in books or digital support. From this point of view, Marques da Silva could only receive with enthusiasm the challenge proposed by the Department of Architecture of the University of Bologna. This exhibition makes it possible again to enjoy the possibility of admiring these drawings, in the same space and in a compression of the different times of their execution; to offer the visitors the option of dwelling on the detail of a drawing or being overwhelmed by the force of the collection; and to look at them with a widespread perspective, although oriented by the narrative proposed by the curators.



An important compilation of this collection of drawings was exhibited by Fernando Távora himself, in either monographic exhibitions or events focusing their unifying subject or theme, which naturally originates from the fact that they are travel records. Other events followed. After the integration of the collection in the Marques da Silva Foundation archive, Manuel Mendes, as the coordinator of the cycle Figura Eminente U. Porto 2013: Fernando Távora, presented some of these drawings in the spaces of Marques da Silva Foundation headquarters, as a part of the exhibition Fernando Távora: 'uma porta pode ser um romance'. Four years later, in 2017, Fernando Távora's son and collaborator, the architect José Bernardo Távora, organized the exhibition Viagem aos desenhos de Viagem in the headquartes of Sociedade Martins Sarmento, in Guimarães (the exhibition now presented in Cesena is based precisely on the selection proposed and presented in that event). More recently, in 2020, again in the headquarters of Margues da Silva Foundation, other travel drawings dating back to 1960 were presented, integrated in the exhibition Mais que Arquitetura curated by Luís Urbano. I viaggi di Fernando Távora is to be considered as a follow up of this line of events, it is more a stage, more an approach, although each project, each segment of the path, each reconfiguration of the space and of the exhibition itinerary will always have its own narrative, its own public, never exhausting the many possibilities of proposing different readings, different interpretations, different queries.

The specific condition of being organised following the criteria of focusing on travel drawing, and more precisely on the travels made by Fernando Távora from 1960 to 1997, governs the exhibition I viaggi di Fernando Távora. The

Fig. 2 General Theory of Space Organization, The example of Chandigarh, Lesson 13. Fine Arts School in Porto, 1991 (FIMS/AFT, ref. A 0035).

presented drawings are able to capture places, sites, details, and they expose the interest of the one who fixed them in that way, through the fine lines traced by a pen on a simple sheet of paper. These drawings expose what had captured the attention of their author, the necessity of comprehension of what he was seeing and what he was compelled to record on paper. And that's because "they are made in order to be able to reflect and learn from what one is seeing and discovering while travelling, because the drawing allows analysis". When considered in a different dimension, they are drawings that cross the time and the borders of the portrayed places and sites, for the artistic skill they reveal and their powerful communication force drive them far beyond the moment in which they were created. To the extent that they are exhibited, in a certain way these drawings keep on travelling, both literally and by bringing to us those same moments and places today's observers are taken back to, in a reverse-direction journey.

In Fernando Távora's words:

the mountain and the chair, the city and the tree leaf, are acknowledged rigorously by drawing, since only drawing allows detecting their very nature, the soul of forms, only drawing is able to communicate them, by interpreting and criticizing them, many times with humor.⁴

Nevertheless, it's better to keep in mind that the exhibited drawings offer only a partial insight into a much wider universe and they must be considered in perspective. They are fragments, mere parts of a much more extensive body, composed by both the travels that are recorded here and the other journeys that are not referred to in this exhibition. And it must be remembered that these exercises in seeing, as a direct consequence of a very peculiar way of thinking and of absorbing the impressions he had the opportunity to experience, were made along with notes written in parallel and photographic records of the same travels, so that a more deep insight into their comprehension should not be exempted from a cross-checking of all these complementary record types.

It turns out that they are, in their condition of drawn records, a part of a much more expressive and substantial set, as they represent one of the multiple possible approaches to drawing and one of the manifold perspectives of immersion in the extensive archive of Távora's production, where one may find so many other drawings that give evidence to multiple ways of comprehension, of "conquest" of what he was seeing as an architect. These drawings attest the process of creation and of development of the design practice, to the extent that Távora himself supported the idea that through drawing "Architects give shape and communicate their conception of the world [...]".5 In other words, in his vast archive we

³ Fernando Távora, in an interview made by Fernando Agrasar, in: Asociación Primeiro Andar (coord.), *Tavora* (exhibition catalogue about the architect's work), (Guimarães, DAA / Museu Alberto Sampaio / Asociación Primeiro Andar, 2002): 22.

⁴ Handwritten note by Fernando Távora, dating back to 1988, transcribed in: Manuel Mendes (ed.), *Prólogo*, C2_3, issue I, series Fernando Távora, 'Minha Casa' (Porto: Fundação Marques da Silva, Universidade do Porto, FAUP, 2013).

⁵ Ibid.

may find different categories of drawings: the ones that respond to a necessity of a material recording of memory; the ones that consist in an act of reflection of thought; the ones that convert themselves into a tool for action and knowledge; the ones meant to communicate and convey ideas and orientations to different kinds of interlocutors. Anyway, in this vast universe we always and in any circumstance refer to drawings made by an Architect, a condition that crosses all the dimensions of Fernando Távora's work as an expression of a life "lived as a passionate statement of the profound meaning of Architecture".

3. About the man and his legacy

Fernando Távora was born in August 1923, in the city of Porto, a town built out of granite surrounded by the River Douro estuary and the ocean coastline. In a text written in 1999, with the title O Granito da minha Infância [The Granite of my Childhood]⁷, Távora advocated that this stone, which always surrounded his physical existence and which he always used in his design practice, was rather the material where the very spirit defining both him as a person and his own work existed, than a mere constructive reference. Endowed with a catalysing personality, from which a great culture and erudition arose, along with a great intellectual generosity able to turn him into an exceptional educator, Távora has been the author of a highly recognized quality, both in conceptual and constructive terms. A key personality in Portuguese architecture of the second half of the 20th century, he had a widespread vision of his profession, transversally crossing many converging fields of knowledge. He designed buildings which are able to respond to their circumstances, as if they were living bodies, with a soul and an image of their own. He pursued the coherence

between what he did and what he had in mind. He proved himself able to find a very personal path, with the History becoming the material of the project, insofar as Architecture represents an age-old dialogue between the earth and mankind: there is always a past to be observed and a future to be built.8

Távora passed away in Porto, in 2005. Besides his built work, he left a vast legacy of documents related to the activity he carried out in his atelier (documented in the most diverse supports: from drawings to writings, from photographs to models), as well as an immense written production where his complex process



Fig. 3
Fernando Távora during the construction of Guilherme Álvares Ribeiro House. Porto, 1967 (FIMS/AFT, Foto4042).

⁶ Fernando Távora and José Bernardo Távora (coord.), Fernando Távora: Percurso. A life long trail (Lisboa: Centro Cultural de Belém, 1993): 9.

⁷ Typed text, dating back to 1999, never published before, found by José Bernardo Távora and first disclosed during the second episode of the podcast *Escritos Escolhidos*, in 2020.

⁸ Fernando Távora, "Escola Superior Agrária Convento de Refóios do Lima", in Luiz Trigueiros (coord. ed.), Fernando Távora (Lisboa: Blau, 1993): 142.

of questioning both the world and himself – his own critical thought – was mirrored; he left many records of both his itinerary as a student and his activity as a teacher; a large collection of honourable mentions and evidences that account for the many positions he was responsible for and the projects he was engaged with; his activities as collector and compulsive reader – and as a traveller, obviously – are well documented, too. Talking about the trail of his influence in his pupils and collaborators, in order to exemplify his relevance it is sufficient to remember that two Pritzker Prize laureates are to be counted among them: Álvaro Siza and Eduardo Souto de Moura. That's why, quoting what Pilar del Rio said when speaking of her husband José Saramago, I would say that for Fernando Távora death was just a mishap.

In 2011, Fernando Távora's family made the decision to entrust to this institution his archive and library: a valuable collection of documents with a great public and cultural relevance. Marques da Silva Foundation was thus endowed with the great privilege and responsibility of becoming the keeper and caretaker of Távora's memory; since then, the Foundation has taken up the role of preserving the architect's intellectual and substantial legacy, thus becoming a mediator between the past time of Tavora's life and the present time going on after his passing away.

In practical terms, this means that Marques da Silva Foundation archives are now holding approximately 320 projects, in the fields of architecture and urban design and planning, both built and unbuilt, developed from 1946 to 2005, among which the projects developed in cooperation with his son José Bernardo Távora are ranked.

A documentary collection consisting of:

- approximately 15,000 drawings
- 60 metres of written documents
- 130 models
- approximately 12,000 photographs, including print photos, negatives, slides and photographic films.

A documentary collection complemented by:

- approximately 7,000 titles from his personal and professional library, where a collection of ancient treatises and a collection of books about Le Corbusier can be found, among the obvious books about architecture and urbanism and many others about history and art history, philosophy, sociology and literature. In this archival fund, the even more relevant private collection of manuscripts, typescripts and prints about Fernando Pessoa should be highlighted; a collection entirely dedicated to the other great Fernando in Portuguese culture and complemented with important contributions by different authors of the so-called *Geração de Orfeu* [the 'Orpheu' Generation], a group of writers who represented one of the richest and most original moments in the history of modern Portuguese literature.

From this point of view, it might be said that the Foundation, as a place of revision and reflection, was assigned the duty of "writing the future time", the time coinciding with Fernando Távora's life, in a constant and continuous quest for significance, oriented to its valorisation and promotion and to the demonstration of the originality of his thought and of his itinerary; a process to be achieved by sedimenting multiple research perspectives and critical analysis of his peculiar and original way of thinking and making architecture.

4. About the path leading to Marques da Silva Foundation

Fernando Távora had not the time to know about Marques da Silva Foundation as it exists nowadays, although the present institutional framework owes much to the incorporation of his archival fund, since in 2005 (the year of his passing) this project was still in a primitive phase of its foundational organisation. Only in 2009 this process was to be settled. He was nevertheless a very active



figure in the process of determining the context which gave rise to Marques da Silva Foundation, since the 1980s, when in his role of President of the founding committee of the future Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto he publicly expressed his support to the architects Maria José Marques da Silva and David Moreira da Silva in their actions of public promotion of the work and career of José Marques da Silva. Marques da Silva was a major architect in Porto, who lived between 1869 and 1947, graduated from the École des Beaux Arts in Paris and was able to leave an indelible trace on his home town. Like Fernando Távora, José Marques da Silva was not only a distinguished architect, but also a preeminent professor and public figure with a relevant civic projection, yielded by the several public positions he held during his lifetime. In the catalogue of the exhibition about Marques da Silva presented in Porto, at the Casa do Infante, in 1986, on the initiative of the Architects' Association - Secção Regional Norte da Associação dos Arquitectos Portugueses - along with the architects Maria José Marques da Silva and David Moreira da Silva, based on research by the historian António Cardoso and with the planning and mounting of the exhibition space by the architect Nuno Tasso de Sousa, as a kind of premonition Fernando Távora wrote that keeping, studying and promoting the memory of outstanding architects – such as Marques da Silva – represented an essential action in order to raise the national community awareness

Fig. 4 Marques da Silva Foundation, view from the main entrance of the José Marques da Silva House-Studio. Porto, 2020 (© Inês d' Orey).

of the substantial nature of the discipline, a discipline "crucial to daily life that should be the basis for the quality of life we all must aspire to and we all have the right to". 9

The bestowal of the inheritance of the married couple Maria José Marques da Silva and David Moreira da Silva, respectively daughter and son-in-law of José Marques da Silva, to the University of Porto legitimised, a few years later, the creation of the Margues da Silva Institute. In 2009, the transformation into the present-day Foundation would follow, in an act of empowerment with a clearly defined mission and strategy. The incorporation of Fernando Távora's archival fund, in 2011, would represent the first relevant moment of expansion of the initial endowment that constituted the original structure of the Foundation. In 2022, when the fusion of the Margues da Silva Foundation archive with the Documentation Center of the Faculty of Architecture – both under the University of Porto – was announced, the Foundation was holding the memory and archives of more than 40 architects, whose work is decisive for the knowledge and understanding of Portuguese architecture in the period from the end of the 19th to the second decade of the 21st century. At the present time, Marques da Silva Foundation along with its function of collecting and keeping archival funds in the field of architecture, positions itself as a dynamic space for research and promotion, with a strong link to universities as the scientific base for its actions and methods of document conservation, and a publishing line of its own. The growth of the physical archive has been followed by the build-up of a digital archive, organised as an essential tool for researching and supplying content on a global scale. The digital archive allows access to a vast collection of information and images related to the itinerary and work of several architects included in the institution archives. More recently, in 2020, since the beginning and consolidation of a continuous programme of exhibitions and cultural activities, it might be said that Margues da Silva Foundation has entered a new cycle of growth and expansion.

5. About the place that distinguishes it

Marques da Silva Foundation headquarters are located in a central area of the city of Porto, in a compound with a relevant heritage value composed of three buildings: the House-Studio, designed by José Marques da Silva in 1909 and restored by Alexandre Alves Costa and Sergio Fernandez in 2015 (it accommodates today the spaces for administrative services and for the reception of researchers, as well as the spaces for temporary exhibitions on the main floor); The Garden Pavillion, restored by Francisco Barata, Nuno Valentim and José Luís Gomes in 2009 (entirely devoted to the documental archive); and the nearby Lopes Martins Mansion, dating back to the end of the 19th century, not yet entirely restored, but nowadays accommodating exhibitions and events, as well as some archive spaces that expand the main ones, thanks to several ad hoc interventions.

⁹ António Cardoso (coord. ed.), *J. Marques da Silva. Arquitecto. 1869-1947* (Porto: Secção Regional do Norte da Associação dos Arquitectos Portugueses, 1986): 9.

All these spaces are of great material and immaterial relevance, where different times and authors convene – from their original function as domestic spaces meant for inhabiting to their transformation and adaptation to accommodate an institution such as the Foundation.

The significant expansion of the documentary funds during the last years, as well as the consolidation of a



new cycle based on a continuous programme of exhibitions, has led to new structural and spatial challenges that are being answered by the development of a future expansion in the gardens, to be materialized by the new Center for Documentation by Álvaro Siza Vieira. When it is built, as desired, the new extension will represent the "common territory" for both the documentary funds of the Foundation and the Center for Documentation of the Faculty of Architecture of

the University of Porto.

6. About the answer to the challenge

As mentioned before, the acceptance of Fernando Távora's archival fund was accomplished in 2011 and 2012, through a process supervised by Tavora's son and former collaborator, the architect José Bernardo Távora, and by Professor Manuel Mendes, architect and researcher whom Távora himself assigned the task of giving body to the book he always dreamed of. It has to be mentioned that this publishing project, under the title *As raízes e os frutos. Palavra desenho obra*, to be achieved in the context of Marques da Silva Foundation, began to find its accomplishment in 2021 through the publication of the first volume of a total of eight: "O meu caso". Arquitectura, imperativo ético do ser, 1937-1947.

So, the time has come to ask a fundamental question: what has been done since and about the acceptance of this archival fund and how may the activity of Marques da Silva Foundation be assessed?

First of all, information has been made available to hundreds of researchers, who may now access Fernando Távora's documental fund both physically and virtually, following the rigorous, intensive, systematic work of inventory, description, conditioning and digitalisation which has created more than 8000 digital images (more than a thousand of them are already available online for viewing) and a bibliographical digital catalogue allowing access to the titles it contains.

Fig. 5 Marques da Silva Foundation, view from the inside path of José Marques da Silva House-Studio. Porto, 2020 (© Telma Dias).



In addition to this task of mediating the memory through archival and technical processing, in a constant struggle against the danger of obliteration and oblivion¹⁰, Marques da Silva Foundation has been promoting a vast programme of other initiatives allowing us to trace multiple possible interpretative and comprehensive itineraries in Fernando Távora's work, inspiring diverse readings and decryptions of the nature and meanings of his achievements when faced with the questions our own times raise in the dialogues with both his built work and his intellectual production.

That's why during this last decade, since the organisation and the diffusion of information and knowledge that arose from Fernando Távora's archival and bibliographical fund, multiple comprehensive actions have been proposed and supported by the Foundation, both on its own initiative and in cooperation and

Fig. 6

Fernando Távora, 'a door can be a romance', main entrance of the exhibition (Eminent Figure of University of Porto, Lopes Martins Mansion, Marques da Silva Foundation, Porto, 2013 © Helena Amaro).

^{10 &}quot;Memory allows to understand people and facts. Memory is the human being's resource against death and erasure" is a statement by António Cardoso. It is during his Ph.D. research about José Marques da Silva that the idea of the donation to the University of Porto by the architects Maria José Marques da Silva and David Moreira da Silva arose.

partnership with other institutions. These scientific and promotional initiatives are materialised by meetings, exhibitions, conferences, guided visits, publications and book releases (among which support for the activity of translation of Tavora's original texts into different languages should be listed), elaboration of architectural maps and even the proposal or monitoring of the classification processes of built works, such as the petrol stations in Guimarães and the house in Covilhã.

For Marques da Silva Foundation it is clearly an open work in progress, a concept borrowed from the literary universe of Umberto Eco that makes perfect sense in the context of constant and relentless exercise of repositioning Fernando Távora's role in relation to the time in which he lived and in relation to the new challenges that arise from each accomplished stage of the Foundation's activity.

Ten years have passed since Fernando Távora's celebration as a Eminent Figure of the University of Porto, in 2013, a vast programme of events devised by Marques da Silva Foundation, the Rectorate and the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto, under the supervision of Manuel Mendes. Now we are in 2023, when the hundredth anniversary of the architect's birth will be celebrated, with the promise of new insights into the work of a man who liked to cross borders and, liked Fernando Pessoa, liked "to travel, to explore countries, to constantly be someone else" heeping a permanent attention on the quality of the construction of the world.

Considering that this is indeed an exhibition that cannot be separated from the author of the exhibited works, allow me to close this intervention by using again the words written by Fernando Távora himself, hoping that they might help to understand the fascination he is still wielding, also on the ones who did not know him personally or who are not architects, a situation I personally find myself in:

"I know, I know

yes, I know. I know it now and have known it for a long time

yes, I know, I know that.

But I know that, and I also know the opposite.

And it is so difficult to know that and to know otherwise.

To accept that and not to despise the opposite.

Yes, I know.

I know that the earth will be five million years old

I know that life will be three million years old

¹¹ Fernando Pessoa, Viajar! Perder Países!, September, 29th, 1933.

I know that the "small" distance from the earth to the moon increases,

by approximately 400,000 kilometres.

I know, yes, I know,

I know

I know that I'm only 56 years old,

1.65m tall and with a step of 70 centimetres.

Yes, I know,

I know

but I also know

that the beach will be different if you steal a grain of sand

I know

that the sea will not be the same if I steal a grain of sand

I know

that the universe changes when I breathe or even when I think.

Yes, I know

I know that I come from afar and will go far

I know that I am not just here but in many places, I know

that I don't just live as long as I live.

I know that the infinitely large is as infinite as

the infinitely small

and I know and I know more and much more

I know that I am no exception.

I know that I am like all men

- those who were born and died
- those who will be born to die.

And I know that between me and the others is an eternal and indissoluble union,

and that the others need me, as much as I need them.

And I know that knowing we are infinitely great

because we are infinitely small

is what constitutes the passion of life.

I know, yes I know.

(And it is about this life of passion that has been

mine that I will speak.

With irony, with sadness, sometimes with bitterness,

but always, always with passion.)

Years ago I thought a thought to carve on a door

that I offered, symbolically, to the house of some friends.

That thought simply thought: make of each

moment a life.

I offered the door but I didn't carve the thought.

I carved it in my memory and try to practise it daily.

And it is that passion for the passion of life that I passionately want

to convey. For we do not live if we do not plunge

permanently and passionately into the passion of life.

I know, yes I know.

I know."



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Fig. 7 Fernando Távora, travel to Greece: ancient theatre in Delphi, 2000 (© José Bernardo Távora).

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