Manuel Montenegro
Teaching through design. Image as operative history at the Porto School

Opening Act and a Particular Problem

The contribution of Álvaro Siza and of the Porto School has received widespread international attention at least from Vittorio Gregotti's "Architetture recenti di Álvaro Siza" (Controspazio, 1972, 9; Nicolin 1986, p.186-188). From the outset, Siza was identified as the leader of this "Cultural Smallholding"(Portas, 2005, p.253) being held as the best example to understand the approach proposed by the School (Tostões, 2002, p.367), especially after the explosion of interest following the focus on the SAAL process (AA, 1976, 185; Lotus, 1978, 18).

Despite this attention and the resulting hundreds of publications on the author and the School, a thorough analysis of their specificities (especially the relation between both) has remained largely elusive, mostly subjected to partial reviews that concentrate almost solely on publishing the buildings with little analysis of their meaning either in the authors body of work or in the broader scope of the western architectural culture at the second half of the 20th Century. Rafael Moneo, analyzes Siza's most important buildings, ending with the School, "the work that most clearly speaks of this last stage of Siza's career. (…) [An] Architecture of architectures. Architecture of references." (Moneo, 2004, p.251).

As an institution, we may state that the current version of the Porto School started with the entrance to the University, in 1979, with deep roots going back to the "Aula de Debuxo e Desenho do Porto" (1780), and architectural teaching being autonomous since the "Academia Portuense de Belas Artes" (1834). The core problem

is to understand the evolution of the School of Porto on its passage from the Beaux Arts School to the University. The Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto, as an institution, starts in 1979. The Commission responsible for the design of the new building, acting as Client, goes into office in January 1983, with Fernando Távora as president, and Alexandre Alves Costa and Domingos Tavares as the remaining members. To its works presided the idea of building upon two centuries of accumulated pedagogical experience in architectural teaching (Siza, Dias, 2003, p.101), a purpose that will condition the programmatic brief given to Álvaro Siza, and his response to it.

Porto School's General Solution

In this particular project, from all the requirements, together with the careful selection of the architect and the client, we may find a purpose to manage the explosive growth of the school guarding careful consideration of its teaching model. The brief and the design clearly show a strategy of resistance (Costa in SIZA, DIAS, 2003, p.25) facing the instability of the postmodern condition, strengthening the disciplinary autonomy through the hegemonic centrality of the Design Studio space and its product as the main synthesis of knowledge in Architecture.

Siza advances, as it is characteristic of the School, through simultaneous analysis and synthesis, an approach he clearly theorizes in his writings (Siza, 2009, p.25, 27, 317) against the positivism of the analytical methods proposed after the crisis of the Modern Movement[1].

This approach also addresses the question of the relation between History and Design, building a strong response to the ongoing debate held, at least, since the 60's through relevant historians as Rowe, Tafuri, Zevi, Banham, Benevolo or Colquhoun. It is interesting to note that Fernando Távora addresses this issue as early as 1952, on one of his first texts — *A Lição das Constantes*. The growing autonomy of Architectural History and its effects regarding the quality of Architecture were, at the time of the design of the School, being raised again, as we can see, as an example, through Ignasi de Solà-Morales' *Prácticas Teóricas, prácticas históricas, prácticas arquitectónicas*, of 1999.

Tafuri's rappel a l'ordre of 1968 — *Teorie e Storia dell'Architettura* — reminds us of the disservice made by the deformations of Architectural History produced to create a simplified unitary synthesis. Siza, in his designs, understands the impossibility and the futility of aiming to a large unitary synthesis, staying true to the timeless tradition of portuguese architecture of finding the racional adaptative solutions and not seeking ideal utopian solutions. His architecture grows in successive additions, as in a palimpsest that critically recognizes and values pre-existing signs, always with a firm awareness that there is always much to improve. *The transformation of the nostalgia of an all-encompassing modernity in a prospective model, necessarily intuitive and fragmented, defines Siza's architecture as also the approach of Alves Costa. In his presentation "Architecture of Porto", held at the Gulbenkian Foundation in June 1987, Alves Costa elaborates theoretically on what Siza designs in the building of the Faculty of Architecture (Porto, 1986-1993): a meta-narrative already contaminated by shifts, doubts and internal dialogues*[2].

Consistency, in this type of approach, is reached through the appropriate response of new parts to the existing narratives, exploring all the open possibilities of relation and confrontation with other architectures and the conditions of the context.

In the project of the School, Siza understands and relates to the formal problems of this particular part of Porto, changing his approach from a monumental building that would mark the landscape of the river mouth to one that dilutes in the surroundings, following the historical typo-morphologies of the site, the pre-existing suburban villa and the neighboring towers of Campo Alegre, for the freestanding volumes that build the urban front of the site, allowing for the large green masses of the private luxorious gardens to insinuate themselves on the public realm. Inside the towers, the architecture studios are designed after carefully reviewing and refusing the approach of large studio spaces (Kahn, Artigas, Mies), choosing instead small autonomous atelier-like spaces where fifteen students learn from a master (Costa in Siza, Dias, 2003, p.29), trying to prove wrong Bruno Zevi's defence of the impossibility of sustaining a method of teaching that mimics the Renaissance *Bottega*.

Opposed to this rigorous and abstract sequence of volumes of the ateliers (a modernist city), the main building, an organic container, stands housing the collective programs (services, auditorium, museum, library), that renders possible the mass teaching dimension of this School, contorting to adapt to the conditions of the topography, to the context and to the program, relating to strategies of vernacular architectures, or other modern architectures of the 20th century cast away by the orthodoxies of the Modern Movement, together with evocations of other histories of architecture, like Michelangelo's Laurenziana for the Library of the School.

Right from the start, through Távora, the training of an architect in this School is made with the understanding of the importance of history as a solid transversal method for the construction of the present (Costa in Távora, 1993), a critical reaction to Postmodernism, accepting the theories of Rossi and Venturi (especially those of Complexity and Contradiction) but refusing the formal proposals compiled by Charles Jencks.

The use of memory and operative history in the FAUP building is often carried out using the juxtaposed contradiction of Venturi, so as to show, through the building, Fernando Távora's aphorism that "in architecture, the opposite may also be true". Collage is used here as an operative historical reference, a key tool for the design methodology of Álvaro Siza and a fundamental pedagogical tool for teaching at the School of Porto.

The building then allows a comparative analysis of a widespread range of solutions — observation and analysis by correlation, as a petrified Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas — helping to train future architects muscle memory and to better understand the design approach proposed by the Porto School.

The persistence of History and Memory in the design of the building can be understood as the desire to invest it with the role of a permanent lesson in architecture, and by immersion, educating its inhabitants in a particular "way of doing and teaching architecture" (Távora in Siza, Dias, 2003, p.21). Throughout the building, successive references to fundamental episodes of the history of architecture strengthen the capacity of its residents in their disciplinary field, because "in Architecture, learning takes place through the widening of ones references" (Siza, 1998, p.35-36). This can be seen in the overall similarities of the towers with the first projects of Le Corbusier — Citrohan, Ozenfant, Pessac, or the Weissenhof — or in more particular elements as on the roof terrace of the Bar, evoking the Schminke House, by Hans Scharoun, the facade of the drawing tower, evoking the house of Tristan Tzara, by Adolf Loos, or its roof, again evoking the Ozenfant atelier of Le Corbusier.

"Learning to see is critical to an architect, there is a baggage of knowledge to which we inevitably resort to, so nothing of what we do is absolutely new", a lesson that Siza left in writing and set in stone.

1 → A good exemple can be found in the writings of Christopher Alexander.
2 → Figueira, 2009, pp.285-6: "A transformação da nostalgia de uma totalidade
moderna em modelo prospectivo, necessariamente intuitivo e fragmentado, define
a arquitectura de Siza e também a abordagem de Alves Costa. Na comunicação
intitulada 'Arquitectura do Porto', realizada na Fundação Gulbenkian em Junho
de 1987, Alves Costa elabora teoricamente o que Siza projecta no edifício da
Faculdade de Arquitectura (Porto, 1986-1993): uma meta-narrativa moderna já
contaminada por deslocações, dúvidas e diálogos internos."

Bibliographical References

AAVV. (1984), Enciclopédia Einaudi, Volume I. *Memória-História*, Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional da Casa da Moeda.

Costa, A. A. (2007), *Textos Datados*. Coimbra: edarq, Edições do Departamento de Arquitectura da FCTUC.

Fernandes, E. (2010), *A Escolha do Porto: contributos para a actualização de uma ideia de Escola*, Doutoramento em Arquitectura, Área de Conhecimento de Teoria e Projecto, Guimarães: EAUM (policopiado).

Figueira, J. (2009), *A Periferia Perfeita. Pós-Modernidade na Arquitectura Portuguesa, Anos 60-Anos 80*, Dissertação de Doutoramento em Arquitectura, DARQ FCTUC.

Figueira, J. (2002), *A forma de um dedo. Um mapa crítico da Escola do Porto*, Provas de Aptidão Pedagógica e Capacidade Científica concluídas em Novembro de 1997 e apresentadas ao Dep. de Arq. da F. C. T. U. C. em 1998; editado em FIGUEIRA, Jorge, *Escola do Porto: um mapa crítico*, Coimbra: editorial do DA da FCTUC.

Fonseca, T. (1996), *A Construção do Polo 3 da Universidade do Porto, Planos, Projectos e Edifícios*, Tese de Doutoramento, Porto: FAUP (policopiado).

Mendes, M. (1986), "'Escola' ou 'generalismo' – ecleticismo ou tradição, uma opção inevitável" in FAUP, *Páginas Brancas*, Porto.

Moneo, R. (2004), "Álvaro Siza" em MONEO, R., *Inquietud Teórica Y estrategia proyectual en la obra de ocho arquitectos contemporáneos*, Barcelona: Actar.

Moniz, G. C. (2011), *O Ensino Moderno da Arquitectura, A Reforma de 57 e as Escolas de Belas-Artes em Portugal (1931-69)*, Dissertação de Doutoramento em Arquitectura apresentada ao Departamento de Arquitectura da Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia da Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra.

Nicolin, P. (coord.) (1986), *Professione poetica*, Milano: Quaderni di Lotus, Ed. Electa.

Portas, N. (Manuel Mendes, coord.) (2005), *Arquitectura(s). História e Crítica, Ensino e Profissão*, Porto: FAUP.

Quintão, J. (coord.) (2008), *O Pavilhão Carlos Ramos. Colectânea de textos de professores e estudantes*, Porto: FAUP.

Riso, V. (1998), *Álvaro Siza. La Facoltá di Architettura di Porto*, Firenze: Alinea ed.

Rodrigues, A. J. (1996), *Teoria da Arquitectura: o Projecto como Processo Integral na Arquitectura de Álvaro Siza*, colecção "6 lições", Porto: FAUP.

Rodrigues, J. M. (2006), *O mundo ordenado e acessível das formas da arquitectura. Tradição Clássica e movimento Moderno na Arquitectura Portuguesa: dois exemplos*, Dissertação de Doutoramento em Arquitectura, Porto: FAUP, (policopiado).

Ruskin, J. (1989), *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, New York: Dover Publications, [1849].

Siza, Á.; Morais, C. (ed.) (2009), *01 textos: Álvaro Siza*, Porto: Civilização Editora.

Siza, Á., Dias, A. (2003), *Edifício da Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto, percursos do projecto*, Porto: FAUP Publicações.

Siza, Á. (1998), *Immaginare l'evidenza*, Roma: Laterza, 1998.

Távora, F. (1993), Arquitectura e Urbanismo — a lição das constantes, revista *Lusíada*, Vol. 1, nº 2, Novembro de 1952, pág. 151-155; reeditado em Távora, F., *Teoria Geral da Organização do Espaço. Arquitectura e Urbanismo, a lição das constantes*, Porto: FAUP publicações [1952].

Tostões, A. (2002), *Cultura e Tecnologia na Arquitectura Moderna Portuguesa*, Doutoramento em Engenharia do Território apresentado ao Instituto Superior Técnico, Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, Lisboa (policopiado).