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EDUARDO SOUTO DE MOURA, *ARCHITETTI*,  
*ARCHITETTURA*, ELECTA S.P.A., MILANO, 2023.

One of the central motifs in this book is the reluctance of its author to express himself through writing. Eduardo Souto de Moura writes, “In contrast with other architects, writing does not interest me at all.”<sup>1</sup> This is a clear illustration of this position. Of course, the life of a person is filled with words, whether uttered or penned. What should be added is that this not just any person, but a person as architect. Architecture is manifested through the works it produces. The question is what is the exact meaning of the term “work” in the previous sentence. It remains ambiguous there.

Eduardo Souto de Moura prefers the non-discursive act. Architects write texts, but the primary work of architecture remains the architectural object. In this book, that is, in the very same text containing the above quote, we find an observation of Maurice Merleau-Ponty: “The artist has but one way to represent the work on which he is engaged. It is to make it.” This is a place from *Phenomenology of Perception*.<sup>2</sup> With this act, the architect represents their work to themselves and others. It is easy to imagine a context in which a work is bashfully silent due to the manipulative eloquence of its author. An architect’s discourse about an object not yet designed cannot stand in for that work, *il faut qu’il la fasse*. The same is true when the work is completed for, although the author is its representative, one who may speak on the work’s behalf. It is well-known that Souto de Moura has an issue with windows, yet this

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<sup>1</sup> E. Souto de Moura, “Scrittura, tempo, architettura,” *Architetti, architettura*, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Gallimard, Paris, 1945, p. 210.

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book is a “window” into his and other architects’ opus. Even expressing resistance to writing through writing displays a philosophy or theoretical conviction.

The quote from Merleau-Ponty was probably copied from a so-called “red notebook.” Souto de Moura mentions this notebook, in which he jots down the thoughts of various authors he finds inspirational or significant. This book is replete with selected quotations, from poets to philosophers, and their use in specific places is characterized by *adequacy* (to use a term from the title of one of the collected texts). Deference towards the other is evident in another aspect. Not only architects, but also projects and built objects are a legitimate subject of the portrait genre. Among else, Souto de Moura writes about his friends Fernando Távora and Álvaro Siza. When the subject of a given text as a whole is a particular object, it is always designed by someone else (e.g., “Herzog & de Meuron: The Bordeaux Stadium”). The careful reader will note the absence of egocentrism.

The book title, *Architects, Architecture*, is simple, which does not mean it is banal. Actually, attempts at unnecessary complexity often result in the banality. However, is the order of these two terms significant—in the sense that the more important one is placed first—that is, that architecture as such draws on and lives through architects? It is a coincidence that the last word of the book is “architect.” Nevertheless, the fact is that the first word in the title and the last word in the book are the same, bringing us thus full circle. The difference is only that the former is in the plural, while the latter is in the singular.

A reputable architect must articulate their views through text and publish a book. It is a matter of convention or expectation. While architects design objects, philosophers write books. What would be the difference between their respective works? Souto de Moura says that writers are responsible to themselves, while architects are responsible towards others. Architecture is a “social art,” and its objects acquire the status of artistic when they are collectively accepted and adopted.<sup>3</sup> This book no longer belongs to its author, but to architecture. Souto de Moura notes that to Távora, books were “friends.”<sup>4</sup> This book has become my friend, with whom I continue to spend valuable time.

<sup>3</sup> E. Souto de Moura, “Le Thoronet,” *Architetti, architettura*, p. 105.

<sup>4</sup> E. Souto de Moura, “Fernando Távora,” *Architetti, architettura*, p. 70.