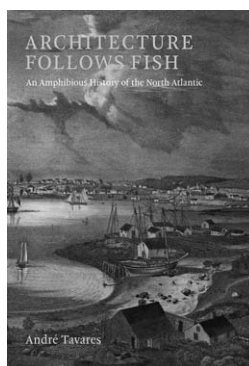


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ARCHITECTURE FOLLOWS FISH AN AMPHIBIOUS HISTORY OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC

ANDRÉ TAVARES



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“There is no apparent difference between brick and fish, between geological and biological elements, as if the extraordinary structure was actually built of herring.” This striking comparison captures the tone of the book *Architecture Follows Fish: An Amphibious History of the North Atlantic*, in which architect and author André Tavares explores how fishing practices shaped architecture across the North Atlantic from the early modern period to the late twentieth century.

Although authored by an architect, the book does not focus on architecture as a designed object. Instead, Tavares conceptualizes architecture as the material outcome of human practices embedded in natural systems. This perspective moves beyond the professional notion of architecture as the architect’s act of designing a building, shifting the research toward a methodology grounded in environmental history – one that enables the analysis of the social and ecological relationships shaping the built environment.

In this, Tavares joins a growing field within architectural historiography that reconsiders the past through environmental and ecological lenses, to critically examine architecture’s entanglements with environmental degradation on a planetary scale.

Fishing and fish-processing practices exemplify a form of human activity that relies on the sea while simultaneously shaping the land. On this basis, Tavares coins the term *fishing architecture*, a concept that bridges land and sea into a unified amphibious logic. This logic is mediated by marine ecologies and human extractive practices. The former is defined by the biological traits and behaviors of fish, while the latter builds on these logics to shape naval and terrestrial structures to scale the resource extraction.

Tavares examines multiple fish species to show how their biological characteristics have given rise to distinct architectural forms. Sardine canneries, herring smokehouses and cod-freezing plants all exemplify how different species drive specific technological and spatial responses. For instance, sardines are rich in fat and therefore suited to canning,

leading to the development of fish canneries as a distinct building type. Cod, by contrast, is a muscular fish ideal for drying, prompting the construction of open-air racks for drying.

The architectural forms that shape coastal fishing landscapes often exhibit a simple and modest character which is frequently associated with vernacular architecture. The image of the vernacular was famously articulated by Bernard Rudofsky through his notion of *non-pedigreed* architecture. While Rudofsky’s photographic representation of *architecture without architects* celebrated the anonymous nature of such forms, Sigfried Giedion offered a technological reading in *Mechanization Takes Command*, where he examined the spatial logic of slaughterhouses through the relationship between animals and systems of meat production. Building on these perspectives, Tavares’s analysis highlights the destructive impact of fishing structures on marine ecosystems, adding a critical ecological dimension to the understanding of the vernacular. In doing so, he cautions against romanticizing these forms, as idealized views of vernacular architecture or idealized national architectural histories can obscure the complex ecological, technological, and cultural entanglements that define them.

Tavares uses both the ocean and the fish as agents to challenge anthropocentric narratives. By bringing together diverse examples of fishing architecture from across the North Atlantic, the book constructs a *pan-Atlantic* architectural history. As marine species that do not recognize national boundaries, fish become tools for transcending the territorial logic of nation-states. On a world map where the ocean’s zones are divided by geopolitical and economic interests, the fish perspective reveals hidden interactions between sea and land. By uncovering these, Tavares encourages us to see the ocean not merely as a resource but as a spatial agent that shapes everything from fishing gear to processing infrastructures and food systems.

Throughout the book’s five chapters, Tavares guides us through the biological dimensions

of the ocean, the technological development of fishing, the land-based fish infrastructure, the political dynamics of resource extraction and the cultural significance of dietary practices. Tackling these specific biological and technological histories across vast geographies requires moving beyond the disciplinary boundaries of architectural knowledge. Tavares does this through his research project *Fishing Architecture*, which brings together marine biologists, underwater archaeologists, historians, and architects.

I encountered the productive framework of this interdisciplinary exchange firsthand as a guest presenter at the project’s 2024 gathering in Portugal, where I shared my doctoral research on socio-spatial systems formed around sardine canneries in the Eastern Adriatic. The interdisciplinary character of the *Fishing Architecture* project echoes the collaborative research methodology of influential anthropologist Anna Tsing, whose work on global commodity networks of the matsutake mushroom traces the fragile and uneven entanglements between humans and nonhumans. Like Tsing, Tavares weaves fragile, fragmented, yet interconnected narratives across the vast geographic area, reimagining architecture as a collaborative and multispecies practice.

The book’s global scope moves across geographies – from Norway to Newfoundland, Brittany to the Azores – but offers more than historical insight. Through the lens of the fish, Tavares interrogates architecture’s role in the global environmental degradation, technological shifts and changing cultural patterns, offering a framework for reflecting on contemporary ecological crises that transcend national borders. Just as Tavares integrates diverse perspectives, his book will appeal to a wide readership.

For architectural professionals and scholars, it provides a compelling case study and a methodological framework that addresses the entanglements of architecture, seeking more integrated, relational understandings of the world we build and inhabit.