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MODERN ARCHITECTURE AND  
URBAN MODERNIZATION IN  
LATIN AMERICA (1930 - 1950):  
A REVIEW OF THE  
PERSPECTIVES AND METHODS  
USED TO APPROACH THEM IN  
LOCAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

The expression of modern architecture and urbanism in Latin America appear as the objects of local historiography in the early 1970s, when they have already been placed in the chapter of peripheral reproductions by the builders of the international canon. Since then, the construction of the history of the modern experience in the region has been approached from different perspectives. If the first stories aim to serve the critique of contemporary production, as early as the 1980s, historiographical propositions took shape to abandon the canonical story and to interpret modern architecture in Latin America through a series of circumstances that emerge from the local contexts. In the 1990s, an exacerbated regionalism elaborates a discourse raised from the dependency perspective to endorse certain professional practice aimed at expressing the American identity. Such a position has been diluted during the last two decades, giving rise to approaches that cross disciplinary knowledge by other knowledge and contemplate the imprints of previously ignored actors, replacing the single story with a multiplicity of stories and giving greater density to the interpretation.

KEYWORDS

Modern architecture. Latin America. Historiography.

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ARQUITECTURA MODERNA Y  
MODERNIZACIÓN URBANÍSTICA  
EN LATINO AMÉRICA (1930 – 1950):  
UNA REVISIÓN DE LAS  
PERSPECTIVAS Y LOS MÉTODOS  
UTILIZADOS PARA SU ABORDAJE  
EN LA HISTORIOGRAFÍA LOCAL

RESUMEN

Las manifestaciones de la arquitectura y el urbanismo modernos en latino América aparecen como objeto de la historiografía local a principios de la década de 1970, cuando ya han sido colocadas en el capítulo de las reproducciones periféricas por los constructores del canon internacional. Desde ese momento, la construcción de la historia de la experiencia moderna en la región ha sido abordada desde diferentes perspectivas. Si los primeros relatos apuntan a servir a la crítica de la producción contemporánea, ya en la década de 1980 toman forma planteos historiográficos tendientes a abandonar el relato canónico y a interpretar a la arquitectura moderna en latino América a través de una serie de circunstancias que emergen de los contextos locales. En la década de 1990, un exacerbado regionalismo elabora un discurso planteado desde la perspectiva de la dependencia para avalar a cierta práctica profesional abocada a expresar la identidad americana. Tal posición se ha diluido durante las últimas dos décadas, dando lugar a enfoques que atraviesan el saber disciplinar por otros saberes y contemplan las improntas de actores antes ignorados, reemplazando el relato único por una multiplicidad de historias y otorgando mayor densidad a la interpretación.

PALAVRAS CLAVE

Arquitectura moderna. Latino América. Historiografía.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The construction of the history of architecture and cities in Latin America — and in Argentina — is an activity that already has a century of development, considering that the centennial triggers the first historiographic works in the continent. The emphasis on the formal aspects, the documentary zeal and the attention focused on monuments will define the touch of production until the 1970s. The emergence and development of modern architecture in our area — that produced between 1930 and 1950 — will be the object of historiographic study only from the 1970s, when the first works addressing it are published. Radically different from the architecture of the colonial era and the academic production of the turn of the century, modern architecture represents a challenge for historians of the field, since it poses a dilemma between the usefulness of the traditional historiographic perspectives and the need to explore new methods and new tools for its examination.

In what follows, the purpose is to present a series of approaches, perspectives, or viewpoints (not always accompanied by an explicitly formulated historiographic approach, but allowing, in a certain way, to have an idea of it) of authors from Latin America who have studied the modern city and architecture in the region, exploring its foundations, trying to establish points of contact, divergences, possible affiliations that determine historiographic lines. The selection does not exhaust, not even remotely, all that has been written on the subject, and there may be important omissions. A chronological order has been chosen for its presentation, as a criterion that allows for the reading of the transformations carried out in methodological approach perspectives, the contemporaneity of diverse approaches, possible dialogues and other types of relations between different positions on a specific knowledge.

## 2. FROM THE OUTSIDE OR FROM THE INSIDE: TWO POINTS OF VIEW

In 1969, Francisco Bullrich, publishes *Nuevos caminos de la arquitectura latinoamericana* (New Directions in Latin American Architecture), as part of a collection from the publisher George Braziller<sup>1</sup>. In the introduction, titled *Pasado y presente*<sup>2</sup> (Past and present), the author warns that at the beginning of the 20th century, the debate on the «national issue» appears as the common denominator in every country of the region. Bullrich states that in the 1930s the discussion about national architecture takes on real relevance, and that is expressed in local architects' consciousness of their dependence on European and North American models of modern architecture and in the simultaneous need to find an authentic, new and personal expression.

From there, Bullrich seems to point out which should be the way to achieve that authentic artistic expression, which according to him is radically different from the simple objective reproduction of certain local reality data. Considering the existence of the «spirit of a nation» as a dimension in permanent change and transformation, this cannot cling to history. On the contrary, it can only take

<sup>1</sup>The collection was called *Nuevos caminos en la arquitectura* (New Directions in Architecture), and included volumes dedicated to Japanese, English, German, Italian, African, North American, Swiss, Spanish, Soviet, and Scandinavian architecture.

<sup>2</sup>In the same year, 1969, Bullrich published, under the seal of Editorial Sudamericana, the book *Arquitectura latinoamericana. 1930 - 1970* (Latin American Architecture. 1930 - 1970). The first chapter is titled *Pasado y presente* (Past and Present), and contains exactly the same text that had been published in *Nuevos caminos en la arquitectura latinoamericana*.

material form in the individual will: “it is the unique work of art that contributes to make a concept as national spirit real” (BULLRICH, 1969, p. 18). Thus, according to the author, a set of individual expressions acting in choral fashion would succeed in expressing the spirit of a nation when, paradoxically, they can transcend the local dialect to speak the universal language, that is, when they find the way to get involved in a world that tends towards homogenization. Bullrich rules out that the development of a national expression can be the result of a political program or a theoretical-critical project; it cannot be imposed from a level higher than that of the individual creator, the individual artist. The approach perspective of modern architecture in Latin America that he suggests focuses on looking at its possibilities to express the spirit of each nation in a contemporary manner, studying buildings as closed objects and considering their authors as «creative geniuses». Its history — eventually an input for criticism — is a history of works and architects, in which other parties outside the disciplinary and professional field have a very marginal role, or definitely none at all.

<sup>3</sup>Liernur specifically refers to Maria L. Scalvini and Mary G. Sandri’s research in which, after studying the founding texts of the history of modern architecture, the authors conclude that in all of them the elaboration of a canonical and single image is present, which schematizes the development of western architecture as a narrative that begins with a moment of uniqueness and plenitude, continues with one of decomposition and break, and ends with reincorporation, recovery of cohesion and universal dissemination. That last stage is the one corresponding to the emergence of modern architecture.

<sup>4</sup>The author uses the eloquent metaphors of «casa matriz/ sucursal» (headquarters/branch) to express the role of simple reproducers of foreign creations that Latin American professionals had occupied according to certain historians; and of «convex mirror» to indicate the value of the reproduced copies as distorted versions of the metropolitan models.

*El discreto encanto de nuestra arquitectura. 1930/1960* (The Discreet Charm of our Architecture. 1930/1960) by Jorge F. Liernur, appears in the magazine Summa, No. 223 (March, 1986). The aim of the article is to reflect on the architecture in Argentina in that period. Liernur begins by noting that the traditional historiography of modern architecture has ignored scientific accuracy and critical sharpness, and the evidence lies in finding that the development of the monolithic canon of modern architecture responds to a narrative order comparable to a fictional construction of classical features, closer to literature than to science<sup>3</sup>. By the time the article was published, the unitary character of modern architecture gathered under the label of Modern Movement has been deconstructed by new historiographic approaches endowed with a strong critical sense, revealing the existence of multiple nuclei in which the modern experience developed with some autonomy. From this new perspective, Liernur wonders where Latin American and Argentinean production stands now — until then understood as a repetition of aesthetic formulations and programs developed in an original center or «metropolis»<sup>4</sup> —, now that this new position has disappeared as a unit and exploded in numerous parts.

Examining the modern architecture projected in Argentina during the decade of 1930, Liernur detects the emergence of a complex and contradictory outlook that cannot be explained under the logic mentioned above. Understanding the modern architecture produced in Argentina as the result of a dispute in which different options generated in different places are confronted and that is solved through the identification of different native socio-cultural sectors with some of those partialities in order to hegemonize them temporarily leads to a historical reading that needs to examine the selection processes and the transformation operations of the chosen options through which the qualitatively different local architectural production emerges. The approach proposed by Liernur leads to an open methodological approach, which requires the study of a series of fields that experience architecture as an institution and, consequently, the use of new instruments of analysis.

The identification of a series of principles with which the canonical narration of architecture in Argentina has been developed and their subsequent deconstruction through new tools of interpretation function as a demonstration of such formulation: a procedure through which new arguments shed light on the disciplinary culture of the time and reveal it in all its complexity, moving it away from the traditional canon that is now revealed as an obstacle to historiographic progress.

Two years after the publication of the article of Liernur, Enrique Browne publishes his book *Otra arquitectura en América Latina* (Another Architecture in Latin America). The intention is to expose the «evolution» of architectural production in Latin America throughout the 20th century in a panoramic way to find the roots of that part labeled as «other», which according to the author would be the authentic architecture of the region, the most comprehensive expression in disciplinary terms of local identity. Browne's methodology is based on a series of assumptions, among which the blending processes stand out as instruments for the interpretation of the production in the American continent, the use of the concept of style —named as «architectural line» — as a category to organize and classify the large list of works included in the study, and the relative disconnection between architectural production and social, political and economic processes in order to look only at cultural aspects understood as the «area» within which architectural lines make sense.

From these assumptions, Browne develops a scheme divided into three periods: the first one between 1930 and 1945; the second one between 1945 and 1970; and the third, between 1970 and the time of publication. This chronological entry is complementary to another one in which two poles appear in tension: the spirit of time and the spirit of place. On this kind of map the author arranges the diverse architectural lines to trace the evolution of the disciplinary production in Latin America that will clearly emphasize the works as autonomous objects. In the first period, the absence in our territory of the conditions that made the emergence of modern architecture in Europe and the United States possible leads to the simple import of the International Style, a mimetic operation devoid of critical outlook according to the author, which places this line very close to the spirit of time and very far from the spirit of place. Browne distinguishes the literal reproduction of the International Style of the 1930s from the re-elaborations of modern experience produced locally from 1945 onwards, which will never cease nonetheless to have a foreign model as a starting point.

### 3. THE PAST AS AN ARGUMENT: THE HISTORY OF DEPENDENCE

In 1990, Antonio Toca Fernández edited *Nueva arquitectura en América Latina: presente y futuro* (New Architecture in Latin America: Present and Future), a compilation of works by various authors, two of which are examined below. In *Propiedad y ajenidad en la arquitectura latinoamericana* (Property and alienation in Latin American architecture), Roberto Fernández proposes to recompose the entire evolution of architecture and the city in Latin America. At the beginning,

he states that the superposition of Spanish urban patterns on the complex pre-Hispanic settlements “gives rise to the fusion that influences and explains since then almost all the production of Latin America” (FERNANDEZ, Roberto, 1990, p. 56). From then on, Fernández uses the concepts of «mestizaje» (fusion), «sincretismo cultural» (cultural syncretism) and «hibridez» (hybridization) as almost interchangeable ideas to characterize the development of the disciplinary culture in our field. In his discourse, the emergence of modern architecture is explained in terms of «imposition» of an alien language whose original feature is its expansive and homogenizing intention. The historiographic approach based on the relationship of subordination of one’s property to that of others finds the most appropriate tool for structuring the narration in the logic of transculturation<sup>5</sup>. Understood as the more or less transparent transfer of models of central culture to the peripheries of the world, Fernández assures that in the 1930s and 1940s the transculturation of modern architecture was a clear phenomenon in which even interesting adaptations to local circumstances were achieved. By the 1950s, the outlook would be much more dull with the introduction of classicist and neocolonial languages by local populisms, which the author understands, once again, as the transculturation of a similar process that happened in Europe.

In the same book, Cristian Fernández Cox writes *Hacia una modernidad apropiada. Obstáculos y tareas internas* (Towards a Proper Modernity. Obstacles and Internal Tasks.). The text is organized in four sections preceded by a Presentation, in which the central problems that will be dealt with later are exposed: Latin American architecture, from the 18th century to the present, has voluntarily and recurrently replaced the «endocentric» categories — those that emerge from its own reality — with «exocentric» ones imposed by the countries that have led world geopolitics. If there is a way out of this reality, it cannot be other than to select those exogenous solutions that are adaptable to local conditions and build from them an «appropriate modernity» in which the foundational vectors of change and progress of what is modern are mixed with certain particularities that identify us.

In Section I, Fernández Cox traces a history of Latin America, and in the following it structures a history of architecture in Chile from the perspective of mimesis, understood as a mechanical and almost irrational<sup>6</sup> act of reproduction of foreign initiatives, ignorant of meaningful arguments and disconnected from local requirements. When presented in different and consecutive sections of the essay, Fernández Cox seems to disassociate, in methodological terms, the history of societies and their institutions from the history of architecture and the city, or at most, to see the latter as a reflection sometimes distant from the former.

According to what he thinks, the history of architecture in Latin America — eventually, the history of a failure — has led to a critique based on international standards, and therefore incapable of establishing criteria and categories really useful for interpreting production in our area. In this sense, the key seems to be the question of identity, the construction of which should begin by standing firmly in a central position that anchors the focus on local reality and directs it in all possible directions in order to assimilate the world according to real needs

<sup>5</sup> By choosing the concept of transculturation as a notion that enables the interpretation of the future of Latin American architectural culture, Fernández expressly aligns himself with Ramón Gutiérrez, who, in his first edition of *Arquitectura y urbanismo en Iberoamérica* (Architecture and Urbanism in Latin America) published in 1983, recognizes an acceptable historiographic model — although perfectible — and a vast source of information.

<sup>6</sup> The author uses the term «enajenación» (alienation) in the title of the section, alluding to the supposedly thoughtless character of mimetic reproduction that determines the history of architectural culture in Latin America.

and possibilities, avoiding isolation and introspection. Fernández Cox does not construct a historiographic method to approach the modern experience in his country nor does he advance beyond the perspective of the dominant metropolis and the periphery subjected to historical reading; his objective is to construct a new critique, supposedly Latin American and original, for which he formulates a history thought in terms of dependence that enables him to break.

In 1991, three years before leaving Cuba, where he had settled in 1963, the Argentine Roberto Segre published *América latina. Fin de Milenio. Raíces y perspectivas de su arquitectura* (Latin America. End of the Millennium. Roots and Perspectives of its Architecture). Chapter 6, entitled *Asimilación y continuidad del Movimiento Moderno* (Assimilation and Continuity of the Modern Movement), is dedicated to observing the emergence and development of modern experience in our area between 1930 and the mid-1960s. From a perspective that limits the dominant center-subordinate periphery approach but does not abandon it altogether, Segre establishes three categories of analysis although he does not present them as such. The first one is a set of «determining factors» in the process of introducing modern architecture to the subcontinent. The second one consists of discriminating «the double code of modern architecture», an aesthetic-formal one that strictly alludes to symbolic or identification aspects between the image of the new architecture and the progressive character of a social segment or of the state apparatus; and a scientific one, based on content, linked to the notion of economic efficiency and associated with the social sense of the discipline. The third one operates based on determining the «identifying attributes of Latin American spatiality» that have been understood over time: the disintegration of the boundary box, the free internal articulation of functional components and the fluid interrelationship between the building and nature, which can only be recovered in modern experience through the action of certain creators of unique personality. The methodological operation consists of applying these categories to the production of different regional units and establishing valuations.

The publication of *Arquitectura Latinoamericana en el siglo XX* (Latin American Architecture in the 20th Century) under the coordination of Ramón Gutiérrez takes place in 1998. The perspective of approach (designated by a critical selection that positively values practices that express a sort of a position based on the American continent and discards or denigrates those that move away from such position) is explicit from the beginning, evidenced in expressions such as:

*Biographies of architects whose work or thought reveals an interest in the culture of their time and particularly a cultural and social commitment to their country and Latin America have been included. The biographies of other architects of vast and publicized production but whose search or trajectory served or serves other interests or concerns have been excluded* (GUTIÉRREZ, 1998, p. 12).

The book is structured through three main sections: *Textos Preliminares* (Preliminary Texts) by Gutiérrez and other Latin American architects, *Grandes Voces* (Great Voices) by Gutiérrez and G. Viñuales, and *Pequeñas Voces* (Small Voices), presented as a dictionary. In the first section, a text signed by Gutiérrez entitled *Arquitectura latinoamericana. Haciendo camino al andar* (Latin

American Architecture. Making its Way on the Go) is proposed as a synthetic and general history of architecture and the city in the subcontinent. For the period 1930-1950, *Modernismo sin Modernidad* (Modernism without Modernity), the author sketches a panorama marked by cultural dependence and the importation of modern architecture that does not find in our location the conditions that made its emergence in Europe possible, opting for a sort of formal exercise without greater meaning. In this phenomenon, he grants the State the role of promoter of modern architecture as an economic option in terms of costs for certain programs. If during the 1940s there were some searches that attempted a synthesis or adaptation of modern experience to the Latin American situation, in the period 1950-1970, *La irracionalidad racionalista del Movimiento Moderno* (The Rationalist Irrationality of the Modern Movement), the unreflective transcription of international models seems to become the norm, accompanied by the absence of an authentic Latin American theoretical construction and a growing commercialization of the professional field. In the second section, a text entitled *Arquitectura latinoamericana* (Latin American Architecture) reinforces the dependency perspective of the producing center and the receiving periphery that influences Gutiérrez's historiographic program. This is presented as a history of Latin American architecture in which «movements» could be assimilated in some cases to styles, and about which the authors insist: "On the other hand, it is appropriate to point out that, since the cultural focus of the producer is of particular importance, the greater or lesser link to it determines the quality and timeliness of the presence of these movements" (GUTIERREZ, 1998, p. 118). It is not made clear whether greater linkage ensures greater quality or vice versa.

#### 4. THE MULTIPLICATION OF HISTORY: OLD AND NEW FORMULAS

In Chapter 8 of his 2007 book, *La noche americana. Ensayos sobre la crisis ambiental de la ciudad y la arquitectura* (The Americas Night. Essays on the Environmental Crisis of the City and the Architecture), Roberto Fernández published a text entitled *Catedrales laicas. Populismo político, modernidad urbana y equipamiento cultural en América del Sur: 1940-1960* (Secular Cathedrals. Political Populism, Urban Modernity and Cultural Equipment in South America: 1940-1960). Without abandoning the dependency perspective completely, the author complements and nourishes his view by proposing the notion of «exchange flows» between cosmopolitan modernity and orbital manifestations in South America, but he also tries to get out of the strictly disciplinary narrative (lost in objects and personalities) to establish relations between modernity, politics and society. In the last section, called *Flujos de intercambio entre modernidad central y manifestaciones orbitales en América del Sur* (Flows of Exchange between Central Modernity and Orbital Manifestations in South America), Fernández formulates the hypothesis that will guide his interpretation: there are «modern objects» in the Latin American scene and not so much «modern subjects», mainly collective subjects such as the State or groups of real weight in the socioeconomic sphere. The absence of this modern subjectivity in our subcontinent is the result of an ancestral and conscious resistance to modernity, and this fact must be a central element for historical analysis. Since modern

<sup>7</sup>In 2001, five years before the original publication of the article mentioned, Francisco Liernur published *Historia de la Arquitectura en la Argentina del siglo XX. La construcción de la modernidad* (History of Architecture in Argentina in the 20th Century), a rigorous work in which this methodological procedure is tested by connecting the history of architecture with intellectual history, the history of art, the history of the State, the history of institutions, economic history, the history of technology, among other fields.

architecture is one of those modernist objects lacking a modernizing subjectivity to explain its emergence, the most appropriate way to study it is through the analysis of certain phenomena that characterize the flows of exchange of discourses and disciplinary practices between Europe and Latin America, in which certain plots of the social, political and economic act as mediators and carry out transformations.

In 2008, *Trazas de futuro. Episodios de la cultura arquitectónica de la modernidad en América Latina* (Traces of the Future. Episodes of the Architectural Culture of Modernity in Latin America) by Jorge F. Liernur appears. In the Introduction and Chapter 1, *Para una crítica desde América Latina: repensando algunas ideas de Manfredo Tafuri* (A Critique from Latin America: Rethinking Some of Manfredo Tafuri's Ideas), Liernur confirms what was expressed in *El discreto encanto (...)* in relation to the collective, diverse and simultaneous condition of disciplinary production in modern times, but warns that such a historiographic revision (the explosion of origins) has not been accompanied by a replacement in the conventional narrative based on the European-American paradigm as a producing center. In the face of this reality, Liernur's proposal is not to reverse the poles or to write a sort of total history of modern architecture that flattens differences and therefore cancels out criticism. The idea is to develop a history of modern architecture from the construction of local histories of modern architecture, observing the multiple cores of creativity that are positioned in different places as a result of very complex circumstances that must be revealed; a kind of choral history that incorporates new problems.

In the first chapter (originally published in 2006) Liernur goes further with the definition of a historiographic procedure in which history and critique, although they cannot be considered interchangeable terms, are closely linked in methodological terms<sup>7</sup>. Following Tafuri, the author points out the need to explode the apparent unity of the object of study in order to observe a constitutive complexity that is usually limited to the initial perspective. This is not achieved by simply immersing the object in its context, but by disarticulating the context in different layers or planes that shed light on a multiplicity of aspects. The «power and its institutions», in Tafuri's words, are expressed in very different forms at the same time and these discourses go through objects in varied directions, producing in them unthinkable impacts that must be unveiled. The true way to understand a historical phenomenon is to explore until its senses are found beyond its borders, that is, to deconstruct a series of factors strange to its apparent construction but determinant to approach its interpretation.

Liernur attributes to the cultural relativism prevailing in the 1980s the impossibility of acknowledging (on the part of a sector of the critique and of history of architecture in Latin America) the existence of a universal cultural space that liberates and democratizes modern experience as one of the positive aspects of modernization. He also refers to the resistance of the sector itself to observing issues outside the strict disciplinary culture. Both factors lead, according to the author, to a study of modern architecture only in terms of language and representation, which in turn leads to the schematic historiographic formulation of center-periphery, outside and inside, of modern canonical architecture and its local replicas. The consequence is the insistence on the programmatic — and therefore sterile — elaboration of an «other» language as a distinctive feature of production in the Americas that finally deepens the apparent caesura between «them» and «us».

Adrián Gorelik publishes *Correspondencias. Arquitectura, ciudad y cultura* (Correspondences. Architecture, Cities, and Culture) in 2011. In the preface, called *Objetos impregnados de historia* (Objects Impregnated with History), the author exposes the historiographic perspective that directs his work: to bring the complex relations (conceived as «correspondences») to the surface, that is as reciprocal links between two elements of a different nature but of equal value, from which architecture (and the city) and culture mutually construct each other. To contemplate this reciprocity means abandoning the traditional disciplinary history that reflects on itself, transforming architecture and the city into mute and almost esoteric objects, in order to generate a program of knowledge that, according to the author, has a double track. The first one consists of identifying how and to what extent architecture offers a material and symbolic support to the processes of social transformation in space and time; the second attempts to recognize how the cultural dimension constitutes the discipline and densifies it from within, encouraging its transformations and using it as a sensitive indicator of the conditions of the time<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Gorelik himself, however, warns of the program's difficulties, recognizing that the notion of «correspondence» does not always imply a clear link between the worlds that come into contact in the process of the historical impregnation of material forms.

<sup>9</sup> Translated into the specific disciplinary field, the author defines generation as a group of architects and urban planners of the same age who are linked through what she calls «vigencias», a set of knowledge, beliefs and values that constitute an epochal paradigm and that in one way or another determines personal trajectories.

In the chapter called *Nostalgia y Plan, el Estado como vanguardia* (Nostalgia and Plan, the State as avant-garde), Gorelik formulates the hypothesis that governs his later investigation: modern architecture in our location embodies the notion of avant-garde but transforms its meaning by covering itself with a patina of «nostalgia» as an ordering resource of the chaos of the present, while outlining a «plan» to neutralize the fear of the future. In this procedure of reconfiguration of the notion of avant-garde and its project, the State appears as the fundamental actor.

The publication in 2012 of the book *Ciudad y Arquitectura. Seis Generaciones que construyeron la América Latina moderna* (City and Architecture. Six Generations who Built the Modern Latin America) by Silvia Arango Cardinal is perhaps the most recent attempt to build a panoramic history of 20th century Latin American architecture. In the *Introduction*, the author sets out the objective of the book by expressing:

*The challenge of this book is to understand a historical structure through the city and architecture. This structure has a physical delimitation: Latin America, and a temporal delimitation: the modern era. The work is based on the hypothesis that during the modern cycle, Latin America has a series of urban and architectural characteristics that turn it into a historical unit* (ARANGO CARDINAL, 2012, p. 11).

The methodological proposal seems to go from the disciplinary to the extra-disciplinary, trying to understand what is called «historical structure» through architecture and the city, which are, in turn, the ones that define it. The ninety year cycle of work (1885-1975) corresponds precisely to the parable that describes the appearance, development and disappearance of modern architecture, and in turn coincides with the life trajectory of six successive generations. Within this framework, a second displacement consists of taking the perspective away from disciplinary production towards people and concentrating the study on the actors (architects and urban planners) whom she considers individually and as a professional group that expresses itself through diverse manifestations; going for a generational method obeys this decision<sup>9</sup>.

## 5. CONNECTING THE DOTS

From what has been said so far, more or less direct links can be inferred among the perspectives of the authors mentioned, who share points of view or discuss from opposite sides. Therefore, historiographic currents have been consolidated. These, without becoming «schools», are drawing a map of ways of narrating the history of modern architecture that adjusts and becomes more complex with each new contribution.

Francisco Bullrich's work, one of the first in the region to take an interest in modern architecture, breaks with the dominant formalist logic in local historiography to propose a history in which the study of creative subjects — the Architect as genius — is key to understanding the emergence of a modern architecture that gains value by expressing, through the particular prism of artists and freed from any other external requirement, the Latin American condition. In the mid-1980s, the work of Jorge F. Liernur and Enrique Browne seem to follow opposite directions. While Liernur proposes very early on to move away from the «producing European-American/reproducing Latin American periphery canon» logic by recognizing the dissolution of the canon which, as a methodological tool, is more of an obstacle than a possibility, Browne suggests the development of a canon of Latin American architecture in the 20th century expressed as the successive transformation of styles and languages (the evolution) which go through overachieving stages in constant movement until reaching a perfect or ideal one, somehow returning to the formal emphasis prior to 1970. If Liernur expresses the need to broaden the judgment in order to make room in the history of modern architecture for all its manifestations and to understand them through a series of extra-disciplinary crossing vectors, Browne follows Bullrich as he engrosses his historiography in what is strictly architectural and directs the judgment to find a truly local architecture, the «other architecture», inexorably linked to its blending/fusion condition.

Since the late 1980s, the call for cultural resistance addressed by Kenneth Frampton —eventually the epigone of a series of previous approaches — through the formula of «critical regionalism» finds in Latin America an unusual echo and a fertile field for discussion, which is reflected in historiographic production. Within this framework, the history of modern architecture must show the relationship of subordination and dependence established between the peripheral local production between 1930 and 1980 and suffocating producing centers always located outside the subcontinent. The operation aims to legitimize from the critique the recent and supposedly regional production of a series of architects (among which there are some who have become «historians») such as the «divergent» exit or path — as Marina Waisman says — to such an asphyxiating panorama. The story of Ramón Gutiérrez, absorbed in disciplinary terms and focused on denouncing the dependence of local practices on foreign models, influences a large part of the historiographic-critical production of his contemporaries in that decade, whether historians of architecture (Roberto Fernández) or liberal professionals (Antonio Toca Fernández, Ernesto Alba Martínez, Cristian Fernández Cox). In

this program, the question of the identity of local architecture, already addressed by Browne, is at the core of the debate, announced as the objective whose attainment serves as a criterion for validation. Roberto Segre's thought runs along a noticeably different path. From his viewpoint, the experience of what is modern in Latin America is also the chronicle of a dependency in which episodes of rebellion emerge. In those episodes of brilliant lucidity, the responsibility lies exclusively with the singular personalities of certain architects, in consonance with Bullrich's thought. The willingness to create a new Latin America that inspires his revolutionary spirit (just when by the 1990s that ambition faded) is translated into his assessment of the new «regionalist» architectures, which he considers socially committed and technologically adequate.

In the years already lived in the 21st century, a reconversion of the perspective that dominated the last decade of the last century has taken place, at the same time as formulations already proposed previously have been updated and expanded. Roberto Fernandez's perspective, although still limited to the logic of dependence, becomes more flexible when contemplating the possibilities of a return traffic between Latin America and the centers of modern experience, to which he adds as a methodological tool the crossings between modernity, politics and society as a more complete interpretation of architectural facts. A particular coherence is established between the methodological proposal formulated at this moment by Jorge F. Liernur and his thought expressed in the eighties, ratifying the idea of a constellation of nodes among which modern experience circulates in different senses, a notion that Silvia Arango will take up a few years later. Disregarding in this way the possibility of a unique history of modern architecture told from either of the two traditional positions, Liernur's choice for a «history made up of stories» underpins an enormous amount of research that has unveiled realities ignored by previous accounts. The method of historical-critical deconstruction of an architectural or urban event from its immersion in the context as a starting point, which in turn has been subjected to exhaustive disaggregation, ensures a more accurate knowledge of architecture as a complex phenomenon and removes the reflection of sterile formalistic introspection. From this place Liernur discusses the search for the «otherness» advocated by Browne — and persecuted by the critics of the nineties, turned into «property» —, to which he attributes the fact of deepening the isolation instead of finding a way out.

Adrian Gorelik's historiographic perspective is based on that of Liernur, insofar as it proposes a history of modern architecture enriched by other disciplinary fields and other actors involved, among which the State, ignored in the initial perspectives, now plays a relevant role. Silvia Arango resumes the tradition of the general narratives started by Bullrich and continued by Gutiérrez, Browne and Segre. Her perspective shares with the first and the last authors mentioned the emphasis placed on the actors — architects as exceptional personalities — whom she approaches with the unusual generational method. Difficulties in making certain characters fit into the scheme of successive generations that do not diminish the rigor of historiographic methodology. On the other hand, the

willingness to see everything — along the lines of Gutiérrez and Browne — saturates the story with an innumerable number of cases that sometimes dilutes the critical density.

At this point, it remains to be observed that although solidly based perspectives exist today, reducing the historiographic panorama to two apparently conflicting or antagonistic lines —for one of which one should take sides — supposes a vision that, at the very least, limits the possibilities of finding a personal point of view that enables the construction of a methodology of its own for the study of modern experience in Latin America. Reviewing them critically in order to take from them what is considered useful, taking as a starting point the problem at hand, is a valid option that deserves to be taken into account.

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