The sameness x the otherness: What does a global education drive for?

Global Architectural Education Forum 3, Sub-theme: Mobility
Istanbul 15-17 November 2006

Ruth Verde Zein,
Prof. Dr. Architect, Mackenzie Presbiterian University, São Paulo, Brazil

Ana Gabriela Godinho Lima
Prof. Dr. Architect, Mackenzie Presbiterian University, São Paulo, Brazil

Paulo Julio Valentino Bruna
Prof. Dr. Architect, University of São Paulo, Brazil

Carlos Eduardo Dias Comas
Prof. Dr., Architect, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil

Cristián Fernández Cox
Prof. Architect, Universidad Mayor, Santiago de Chile

Julio Gaeta
Prof. Architect, Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico DF

[A apresentação da presente comunicação foi possível graças ao apoio financeiro da Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie para a viagem e inscrição no evento]
ABSTRACT

The intrinsic advantage of displacement is the possibility to find, elsewhere, dissimilar discourses, ambiances, practices and routines. What drives people to change place is not the continuance of the same, but the search of the new, the contact with the unusual, and need to learn about others and so forth, to better learn about ourselves.

Global architectural education presents Mobility as a goal, so it should necessarily combine, over the mandatory basis of a minimum common ground, the opportunity to allow each place to express and edify through their proper peculiarities, displaying their own contributions: the counterpart of the sameness is the otherness.

Within the perspective that the association of multiple and distinctive panoramas is an essential aspect in Global Education, this paper seeks to present the efforts of a inter-institutional group of researchers from different Latin American countries aiming to outline a contemporary revaluation of their country’s contribution to Modern and Contemporary Architecture, considered as a high quality legacy that deserves to be properly considered, and whose broader interest exceeds local attention, since an adequate knowledge of our continent architectural Heritage (with focus on its modern and recent contribution) would probably be an unavoidable
previous qualification to foster our counterpart for global education interchanging programs.

**KEYWORDS:** Architectural education; globalization; Latin America; Modern Architecture; Contemporary Architecture.

1. AND, WHAT HAS LATIN AMERICA TO DO WITH THAT?

The aim for Universality is one of the main foundational ideas embedded on Modern societies. In order to succeed it should strive against the very basis of the previous, pre-modern world traditions and customs: being dynamic and future-oriented, modern societies can’t help trying to constantly remove all traditions from themselves. Globalization would be one of the steps into such a Universality drive; and possibly, a global education would be one of its predictable consequences. In that sense, a global education target would converge to universality, in a future-oriented way (like, enforcing the use of new Technologies and trying to find educational patterns adequate for future challenges) and would have nothing to do with tradition and heritage - and probably, nothing to do with those sectors of the world that, apparently, are not so “modernized”.

Such an economical/sociological rationalization would be an inexorable reality except that it clearly does not work so simply in real life. Human beings cannot be considered only as neutral “universal”, regular individuals functioning completely apart from their local backgrounds and beliefs. And although people tend to gladly accept some aspects of universality and modernization (mainly, those which increase our life quality and our Professional performances) other aspects of our lives keep being rooted on accepted, local-oriented traditions. It is never easy and simple (or even desirable) to cast away one’s heritage, mainly when you’re dealing with cultural issues: architecture, for instance. Architecture pertains to the cultural realm, and may be considered as a very conservative métier, that deals with very concrete questions of the real life.

Nevertheless, to complicate things a little further, along the 20th century one watched the establishment and triumph of Modern Architecture, which sought to
institute a radical break with the previous past forms and procedures aiming at the creation of new, adequate responses to present-day challenges, which would be acquired by looking ahead: envisaging a better future. In that capacity, Modern Architecture played the game of universality endeavoring efforts to surpass traditional forms and procedures, in a universalized world: it that way, Modern Architecture would certainly have nothing to do with heritage.

Paradoxically enough, after almost a century of debates, ideas, propositions, buildings and urban spaces, modern practice in architecture has crossed the line from being an *avant-garde* proposition (the incarnation of the future) and became itself a heritage (the basis on which we refer to, either to keep or to change). That affects the practice in several different ways and deeds, and create more than a few anxieties in the architectural education. While there are still lots of room to changes and innovation – which cannot be forgotten as an still important goal in architectural education - people involved in educational tasks should necessarily position themselves and choose in which place they are on the tension between universality and tradition; and what is at stake is not only some contemptible previous pasts, but Modern Architecture’s own recent tradition.

That is even truer on Latin America: for us, Modernity keeps on being a challenge, and Modern Architecture, our strongest architectural tradition: even our relatively recent local/regional/national cultural identities have being set up not against - but with the help of - modernity. Our main architectural tradition, our cities, our architectural education are anchored on modernity. Also, if we consider the worldwide Modern Architecture heritage, its proper definition could not be set up without the plea to Latin America’s references (perhaps mainly, but surely not exclusively, Brazil’s), whose very important achievements helped to crystallize, then and forever, Modern Architecture face, when they luckily made their scene entrance in a very precise and crucial moment: just when Modern Movement was in process of being universally accepted, say roughly, in the 1940-1960 period.

After another half century, the canonical books worldwide used on architectural education had simply forgotten that, and relegated Latin America to a limbo, as if we have never existed, or have suddenly expired. The almost completely disdain of the relevance of Latin American Modern Architecture pre-1960 is a huge lack that do not seems to be born from a rational and thoughtful investigation of its good or
bad qualities; perhaps, it’s just the result of a hasty and superficial shift of focus: after the hazards of Second World War a reconstructed Europe tended again to lean over its own internal questions, eager to forget those blank decades when their architects, architectural historians and architectural critics had had to refer to Brazilian Architecture, for instance, to exemplify what an architectural modern real building looked like.

The very attitude of taking no notice at all to Latin American contribution to Modern Architecture achievements and debates is not only an historical subject, but also affects present-day perceptions and interpretations. Even when remembered – like in the recent NY-MoMA’s seminar Latin American Architecture 1930-1960 – that is done in a perfunctory and non-innovative way that mostly helps to crystallize old myths, reconfirming it as a closed past, something that ended a good several decades ago, and can be patronizingly displayed as a minor anthropological curiosity.

Handling such a biased focus one can unwisely conclude that, if Latin American architecture once existed, it inexplicably ended (around 1960, or so the legend says). Follows that, nothing that could have happened there, from them on, can be perceived as having any serious interest - mainly to a globalized, world-wide, contemporary vision. As a group of Latin American well known architects, critics and researchers, we would like to assure that that’s not at all true: there is a huge, varied and high quality panorama of architectural works across our continent; that, when better known, would surely play a significant role in the world contemporary architectural debate.

A Global Education Forum is an opportunity to help revise such omissions, myths and prejudices. A whole continent cannot possibly keep on staying under the shadow. And besides, a debate on Global Education should face some interesting paradoxes: while striving for universality, it has to face tradition – embodied on the very Modern Architecture achievements. And, without a sympathetic approach to local contributions and peculiarities, mobility would become a fool’s errand: just a displacement from one no-place to another, the sameness prevailing over the otherness, a waste of time and energy with no aggregated value whatsoever.

In any case, in order to achieve a greater and better Mobility for Architectural Global Education in the near future, sooner or later Latin America should be on display:
better if that does not happen on wrong premises. We certainly would profit from exchange, but that goes both ways: our countries have lots of interesting contributions to global debates, from our superb Modern heritage to present-day architectures, and in addition, there is a complex, varied and very interesting net of debates and trends to share, with several connecting points with worldwide debates along with peculiar qualities: a huge iceberg which only the utmost peak is fuzzily perceived through the mist.

2. SOME CONCEPTUAL TOOLS: APPROPRIATE MODERNITY

Latin America’s contribution to a global education debate can’t be properly done without producing and divulging an adequate historical revision of Latin American contribution to modern and contemporary architecture. In order to perform that task the act of merely collecting information is not sufficient: it has to be handled under the light of suitable conceptual devices.

The construction of such concepts have probably being performed since the 1980’s through several meetings, seminars, congresses, debates and publications reuniting hundreds of architects from several Latin American countries in a complex panorama comprising several distinct paths and positions.

Some of them would be very useful to enhance a broad but attentive historical reviewing: for example, the concept of “appropriate modernity”. Born independently, although synchronically, with the European “critical regionalism” debates, is surely an useful device to better understand modern architecture (be it in Latin America or elsewhere). Not as a closed set of formal stylistic characteristics (to which a work should more or less conform to guarantee its factual pertinence to Modern Movement) but as a permanent striving, a search of equilibrium between universal appeals and local necessities; also, shifting the focus from the reactionary Idea of “resistance” to a progressive vision of modernity as an unavoidable challenge that has to be sought out not necessarily through closed given formulas, and to be acquired with the aid of different materials, Technologies and forms.
The Idea of “appropriate modernity” was born from a deep reflection over the problem of Modernity itself, which can be quickly summarized in the following words of its author, the Chilean architect Cristián Fernández Cox: “As seen from here, there are two different ways of looking at modernity: as a collection of already given answers, or as a collection of pending historical challenges. Each vision can be right, according to the situation where one stands. So, as to the question: “what is to be Modern?” the answers will always be given from a peculiar, determined historicity. And since there are varied ones, it follows that there is no Modernity, but Modernities. One of those modernities – the “Enlightened” one - embodied mostly in Britain, France and United States - for a number of reasons became “triumphant”. So, we tend to ignore its historical nature and think of it as a kind of metaphysical entity, The Modernity, like an absolute normative model, closed and impregnable, when however, it is only fully acceptable to the societies that have truly enlivened it [...].

The search for our “real historic subject” would probably lead to the necessity of searching an “appropriate modernity”: the concept of “Appropriate” can be a useful tool, since it does not intend to deny modernity (or resist it), but to adjust/ filter it to fit our peculiar situation. “Appropriate”, as applied to architecture, can here be understood under a triple signification: 1) as “proper” to a given reality, useful and suitable for a particular condition, occasion, or place – so, consistent and harmonic to it; 2) as “convenient”, something that deserves to be taken, made use of and legitimately claimed by as one's right – after being critically digested; 3) as “peculiar”, responding to a specific situation, belonging distinctively or primarily to us in a special or unique way – not for the search of “originality” but to avoid already given solutions that cannot be properly used inside a different specific context.

One of the most interesting features of this concept is that it avoids and refuses to be another “(...) ism”: it is not a style but an attitude before the architectural creative process, which, as Fernandez Cox states, “in case of existing and spreading would achieve very different results”, respectful of each reality and in such a way that “appropriate modernity” would also be “appropriate diversity” – and so would be in tune with each peculiar national, and/or regional different Identity.

With the help of the concept of “appropriate modernity” it is easy to grasp that, far from being considered surpassed or belated, or be seen as extraneous (subliminally comparing a given situation with a supposedly “standard” pattern brought from
elsewhere), each given reality – including Latin America’s, but not only – should be considered in its own terms. It does not affirm or deny its qualities and/or evils: it merely avoids the a priori prejudices that, most commonly, taint the vision of the so-called central regions over other places and cultures.

3. FROM HERE TO THERE: REVISING MODERN ARCHITECTURE

In the beginning of year 2005 a group of architects, including renowned practitioners which are also theory and design professors, all of them of well recognized local and international competence, including people from three different Brazilian universities and closely connected with colleagues from other Latin American countries (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Uruguay). They proposed to accomplish what seemed to be a necessary and urging task to a better critical architectural education in Brazil, and probably also in Latin America: the writing of a basic compendium on Modern and Contemporary Architecture comprising around 15 chapters embracing important episodes of the second half of 20th century.

Beyond the necessity of having a comprehensive architectural literature in Brazil’s language (Portuguese), the purpose of the compendium was not to repeat again the same old tales, but the possibility of revising the already known in order to better precise its understanding, under the light of recent researches and investigations being held by the professionals purposely invited to be part of the team. It is attentive to themes and debates not well explored by the existent architectural historiography, that tends to be Eurocentric or exclusively interested in the North Hemisphere; a particular attention is given to Latin America and Brazil, not for chauvinistic reasons, but simply to assert its relevance inside the international context of Modern and Contemporary architecture.

The compendium is to be organized in 15 chapters, in a way that it could be used as classes of an introductory course of one semester; the chapter can be read or used in a more or less sequential order, but each chapter has its autonomy, and can be read or used alone or combined with others, also as a bibliographical support to shorter seminars. It is subdivided in three moments or basic periods, with five chapters each, where at least one or two of them are dedicated to Brazil and Latin America,
acknowledging their very importance in regional and international debates. A multiplicity of approaches and readings is encouraged since each chapter would be written by a different author (chosen among the best specialists in that specific area), and because each chapter will include a commented bibliographical selection including other main texts on the matter, from national and international authors, preferably displaying other, complementary and/or contradictory points of view.

A brief abstract of the proposed compendium can be quickly displayed as follows:

**PART I (~1945~1965~)**

Chapter 1. From Brazil Builds to Brasilia

Modern Brazilian Architecture, Carioca School: excellence constructing a modern tradition. Its bonds with academic tradition, quintessentially revised through the hands of Lucio Costa. The thoughtful connection between heritage and modernity as complementary aspects of the same quest for the consolidation of an identity coupled with modernity.

Chapter 2. European reconstruction: the pursuit of an egalitarian society

Housing as a tool to a large-scale implementation of modernist urbanism and architecture ideals. Building industrialization: examples, profitable paths and critical dead-ends. House, blocks, quarters, and cities: examining the wide variety of experiences and propositions.

Chapter 3. Le Corbusier: the unavoidable reference of the post-war

After the voyage to South America (described in Précisions) and his architectural contacts with Brazil, Le Corbusier shows a turning point in his architecture: the same ideas are synthesized in new formal and material ways that would deeply influence the following decades’ architecture all over the world.

Chapter 4. The diffusion of the American way-of-life

America’s advantageous position in the post-war enhanced by the massive migration of European architects generating a rich and varied ambit for architectural and
urban ideas: from Case Study Houses to the Suburbs, from the cleanliness of the American Mies to the expressionism of Saarinen and Breuer.

Chapter 5. Other modernities in Latin America

Intensive industrialization and urbanization plus the desire to update national identities fostered experimentation with new technologies and the expression of monumentality. Possible parallels with USA and Scandinavian countries, and the exceptional particularities of the architectures of Mexico, Venezuela and Brazil.

PART II (~1965~1985~)

Chapter 6. Brutalism as a new international style

Comprehensive survey about the stylistic, formal and technological characteristics of the Brutalism, understood as a wide-spread international phenomenon, inspired on Le Corbusier’s béton brut plus a varied range of other influences and results, in accordance to each place peculiarities³.

Chapter 7. Modernity’s divergent trends and paths

The decades of 1950 to 1970 display a rich and varied panorama of trends and ideas, some of them hastily and biasedly labeled as “late-modern”. Without being fully comprehensive, this chapter seeks to understand them under some basic critical categories, based not on stylistic characteristics but according to their conceptual moods; namely, as intents of expansion / variety / continuity of Modern Movement.

Chapter 8. Modern Movement maturity crises

The end of the CIAMs and the critics of modernist urbanism through typological debates modeled on the European traditional cities. Recycling and renovation of historical cores and the debates of preservation. Contrasts between Europe and America, from Bologna and “Urban Structuring” to suburbanization and “Learning from Las Vegas”.

Chapter 9. From technological utopias to high-tech

Buckminster Fuller, Archigram, Situacionism, Metabolism, and so forth: the exploratory and optimistic belief on technology and the links with artistic trends, from
abstract expressionism to pop art. The reification of this heritage can be perceived in the high-tech discourses and propositions: Piano, Rogers, Foster and others.

Chapter 10. Latin America, the search of appropriate discourses

The technological surge following 1960’s increased the disparities between countries; 1980’s “critical revisions” of modernity do not considered regional realities, implicitly nurturing exclusion, and obliquely subduing their understanding under extraneous patterns. To counterpoint such lacks and misunderstandings, after 1980’s some Latin American critics and historians raise new theoretical concepts to debate their panorama and avoid such excessive polarization. Revalorization of local, “alternative” masters, like Rogelio Salmona, Eladio Dieste, João Filgueiras Lima.

PART III (~1985~2005~)

Chapter 11. The post-modern condition: fragmentation and diversity

Debates about the symbolic nature of architecture; debates reassuming architecture’s own disciplinary field. The perception of the other: genre and other alternative points of view revalorization. Experiments challenging Modern Movement paradigms: Venice’s Biennale, IBA-Berlin, etc. Historiographical revisions: modernity as tradition.

Chapter 12. Terrain vague and urban renovations

Global Urban planning versus local interventions: the city as a palimpsest. Vectors to renovate cities from inside: urban projects on ex-industrial and harbor areas: Docklands, Rotterdam, Bilbao, Barcelona, Puerto Madero, etc: revising modernist urban practices

Chapter 13. The plurality of tendencies ending the century

International recognition of the diversity of paths in architecture: movable criteria and divergent ways in compliance to an inclusive scenario, mistrusting rigid patterns or doctrines. Upraising of energetic and ecological criteria to analyze and propose new architectures & urban places. Competitions as an opportune place to observe the variety of answers and the plurality of tendencies.

Chapter 14. Ibero American architectures
Spain’s successes: climbing to a united Europe and aspiring a cultural leadership on former Latin American colonies. Barcelona’s Olympic Game, Seville’s World Fair as mechanisms of change and consecration. Spain as cultural and architectural exporter: Bohiga’s metastasis method being applied from Buenos Aires to Rio de Janeiro. Great quality, appraisal for tradition and innovation as major characteristics of Spanish and Portuguese new architectures.

Chapter 15. Brazil: new identities revising past traditions

Revising the frozen ideas about Brazilian architecture identity: the shift from the Carioca School to the Paulista Brutalist trend in the 1960’s; new paths and the affirmation of diversity in the 1980’s. Revising the works of several important masters: Assis Reis, Luiz Paulo Conde, Filgueiras Lima (Lele), Mendes da Rocha, etc. The intermediate generation works, strengthening and enlarging the professional field. Young architects in search of an equilibrium between local Modern traditions and international trends.

THE OTHERNESS: IMPORT/EXPORT

This proposed research is being produced in Brazil, with connections in Chile, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia and Uruguay. But it is conceived to be at home in a larger, global territory; its participants are drawn from different countries, and erasing the differences of false localisms. Their aim is not only to go further down in history, but also to stimulate new horizontal readings that over comes borders and seeks to weak and defeat the north-south readings, taking advantage of the “universal” nature of the discipline.

“Globalization and internationalization are insistently referred to as a new phenomenon, as the new zeitgeist. However, the phenomenon is as old as colonization, or better yet, it is a direct result of it, for every kind of hegemonic attitude entails the imposition of certain patterns that evidence such circumstance. […] The phenomenon, with the new dimensions it has acquired, has obviously turned into something more complex in our days” 4. Such complexity of contemporary globalization process may allow some factual and conceptual room to help enlarge a better and healthier
understanding of the very phenomenon: it does not need to be an inexorable process that will forcibly spread from a given center to engulf all places and institute a world-wide sameness; but rather, the opportunity for mutual exchange, to export/import ideas (with the help of students, professors, publications, debates...), not only to acquire new visions, but also to revise crystallized previous ones, out of a multi-layered acceptation of the otherness.

An architectural global education, in order to improve Mobility, should not stimulate the mere wandering from one to other place to mechanically come across the same, neither should it be foster the arrogant attitude of looking at the different as a mixture of bizarre and glamorous. The concept of “exotic” should be revised: shifting from a vision of something striking and attractive but unrelated, different, extraneous and disconnected from the reality of a given center; to something that, being different and peculiar are also worthy, and deserves to be better understand and properly known in its own terms, as a manifestation of the infinite diversity of human nature. The surprise may be that, in the end, we’ll realize that, before considering the other, we were not really aware of our true selves.

**RESUMO**

A vantagem intrínseca do deslocamento é a possibilidade de encontrar alhures discursos, ambientes, práticas e rotinas distintas. O que leva as pessoas a buscarem novos lugares para sua educação e sua prática profissional é a busca do novo, do contacto com o não usual, a necessidade de aprender sobre os outros e assim, se conhecer melhor.

A educação arquitetônica globalizada apresenta a Mobilidade interinstitucional de estudantes e professores como algo a ser alcançado. Assim, além de uma base minima comum indispensável, cada lugar deve poder expressar e edificar através de suas
peculiaridades e próprias contribuições: a contraparte do mesmo é o diverso. Nessa perspectiva, a associação de múltiplos e distintos panoramas torna-se um aspecto essencial da educação superior globalizada. Nesse sentido, esta comunicação pretende apresentar os esforços de um grupo inter-institucional de pesquisadores de vários países da América Latina que vem se propondo a organizar uma re-avaliação contemporânea acerca da contribuição de seus países à Arquitetura Moderna e Contemporânea, a qual é considerada como um legado, de alta qualidade que merece ser melhor e mais apropriadamente conhecida, e cujo interesse vai além do âmbito local, já que um mais amplo reconhecimento da nossa herança cultural vai provavelmente se tornar uma inescapável qualificação prévia para se alavancar a participação das escolas latino-americanas nos programas globais de intercâmbio de ensino.

**Palavras chave:** Formação do arquiteto; globalização; América Latina; Arquitetura Moderna; Arquitetura Contemporânea.

NOTAS

1. As for that, the initiative was completely in tune with the recent IX International DOCOMOMO Conference, that proposed as its main subject that “the mainstream historiographic construction of twentieth-century modernism through its canonic texts and buildings has marginalized or suppressed some modern trajectories, which are now gaining an unprecedented legitimacy as the subject matter of revisionist histories. Today the exclusive, totalizing and teleological histories of modern architecture are highly suspect and the presumed internal consistency and morphological integrity of modernism is no longer taken for granted by recent critical approaches in line with contemporary scholarship in the humanities and social sciences”.
2 The compendium contributors include the following Brazilian architects/professors: Ana Gabriela Godinho Lima; Anita Regina Di Marco; Assunta Viola; Carlos Eduardo Dias Comas; Cecilia Rodrigues dos Santos; Hugo Segawa; Leda Maria Brandão de Oliveira; Lizete Rubano; Mario Figueroa Rosales; Monica Junqueira de Camargo; Paulo Julio Valentino Bruna; Ruth Verde Zein. As consultants, the architects/professors: Cristián Fernandez Cox (Chile), Silvia Arango (Colombia), Julio Gaeta (Mexico/Uruguay).

3 Being a very important architectural trend that stretched through at least two decades, mostly but not exclusively on 3rd World countries, the Brutalism is one of the least studied subjects of architectural history, unjustly charged with misinformation and prejudice.