FOREWORD

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(TRANSLATED BY LUIS E. CARRANZA)

PARADOXICALLY, thanks to this book, we can begin to think that discussions like the one included herein on architecture in Latin America will gradually cease to exist. I'm not suggesting with this statement that the book has reached a type of *summae scientiam* on the subject—something that the authors themselves have ruled out. What I mean is that a book like this brings us closer to the end of the narratives about “architecture in Latin America.”

To begin, we must note that Carranza and Lara's text is entitled *Modern Architecture in Latin America*, and not *Latin American Modern Architecture*. In this way, it separates itself from the line that links Henry-Russell Hitchcock's book (*Latin American Architecture since 1945*) with Francisco Bullrich's (*New Directions in Latin American Architecture*) and with the more recent “Latin American Architecture Seminars.” The difference is that Latin America is not presented here as an attribute but as a geographical support. The use of the word as an adjective assumes that the attribute is an essential category and that it is able to permeate the entire production that can be identified with it. In this sense, “Latin American” work is not just a building in that region of the world but rather a building that *expresses* this region.

By pointing out this difference, I am not asking the reader to get lost in the sophisticated subtleties of language that might be somewhat insignificant. Rather, the issue is of greater importance: “Latin Americanists” argue that the culture produced in the region is radically different from that which is generated in other parts of the world. They think that there is a constitutive, constant, and shared core that generates a dynamic sense of “ownership” or “critique” with regard to what happens outside the region. Moreover, in the last instance, they think that there is a sort of indivisible “I” that belongs to the region (perhaps a soul?) that expresses itself in clearly identifiable traits and that makes it react in unison against any external stimuli. I do not rule out that there might be those who think

this form of reasoning may seem anachronistic. The nation-state and, with it, the notion of “the people” that upholds and justifies it, has long been questioned, and a statement of its coherence is no longer part of any important intellectual discussion. There have even been proposals to replace the very idea of an essentialist notion of “the people” with a more contemporary notion of “the multitude” as an articulation of its changing uniquenesses.

The use of the term “Latin America” as a noun is crucial, and it is what determines the structure chosen for this book, which is clearly articulated in the introduction. The book is constructed as a quilt: composed of different parts, each joined together by a formal structure. The parallelogram that determines the shape of the quilt is itself constructed by the very book itself. Although different from each other, the parts that make up the book, like the individuals in a crowd or the pieces of a quilt, do not end up dispersed but rather are articulated together by a fortuitous purpose. The narrative does not lead to a conclusion with ideological claims but relies on a chronological structure. We should not be deceived, however, because devoid of any teleological impulse, the chronology employed has the same arbitrary unifying structure as does the rectangular shape of the quilt.

However, this is not the most important change in approach through which the book, I believe, enacts a paradigm shift or, if you will, announces the end of a process. I think its main contribution to the knowledge of modern architecture in Latin America lies in its character as a type of compendium. Its chronological structure serves as an arbitrary organizing system, given that its authors did not intend to put forth a *single* interpretative key to support a *conclusion* that, by definition, they do not believe in. The chronology also serves as an axis along which, as on a skewer, pieces with very different characteristics are inserted: buildings, artistic movements, events, biographies, social processes, institutions.

The book is a compendium of those pieces that, in turn, are the result of the steady growth in recent decades of the historiography of modern architecture in Latin America. In contrast to what has happened in previous decades, this field has only partially been organized around strong ideological assumptions (the “Latin Americanists”). For the most part, the studies on the subject have manifested themselves as the result of the increasing proliferation and expansion of scholarship on the subject, both within the region itself as well as in the United States and, to a much lesser extent, in Europe. Of course, this growth is an effect of its appealing issues but also, and perhaps more so, reflects the general growth of the knowledge industries that, in turn, have instituted new structures and demands in recent decades. Through them, the number of master’s and doctoral programs has multiplied in an unprecedented way throughout the region, and, as a consequence, the means of disseminating, exchanging, and legitimating the scholarship in this area have also increased. Thus, as with other branches of academic knowledge, there has been a marked increase in the number of monographs, essays, theses, articles, magazines, and books destined to complete the processes of emergence and consecration of this field.

This is a very different scenario to that within which the pioneering narratives of Hitchcock or Bullrich were constructed. It is also as a part and a consequence of this new context that this book is meant to be read. Its invaluable character as a compendium gives us for the first time, presented in the arbitrary order of a chronology, the most relevant results of this new and vast universe of scholarship that has resulted from the growth to which I referred. To which we must add, and especially considering *where* this book is being published for the first time, the role of the development of these studies within the U.S. academy. We can also not help noting the fact that this first compendium is *not* written in Spanish or Portuguese, but in English. Of course, it needs to be highlighted that the use of this lingua franca is what will facilitate the wider dissemination of this knowledge to an international audience. But this is not enough. That this compendium of modern architecture in Latin America has not been written and published in Latin America can be understood as a result of two factors. On the one hand, it should be noted that this is a study of a grouping of twenty-seven countries and dependencies (including the Caribbean) with very

different economic and political conditions, covering a total area of 22,000,000 sq. km, with enormous geographical formations that separate them across equally vast distances extending some 14,000 km between the north and the south. It is a grouping that is not bound together through homogeneous or appropriate ground transportation systems, so the only way to cover the vast distances needed to understand it is via airplane. The scholars from this region who propose such a study must overcome these obstacles and with very limited resources, despite, in the best of cases, coming from “developing” countries; this explains the aforementioned conditions. But the obstacles do not end there. It is no accident that the first version of one of the primary studies of modern architecture in the region, Francisco Bullrich’s *New Directions*, came from a U.S. publisher, or that another survey, *América Latina en su arquitectura*, edited by Roberto Segre, was sponsored by UNESCO. The diversity of the countries and their political regimes, the specificity of their economies, and the differences in the values of their currencies or import duties make the existence of regional publishing houses extremely difficult. Additionally, the linguistic differences that exist in the subcontinent between the languages of Hispanic or Lusitanian origin work against any sense of cultural unity.

On the other hand, the growing importance of “Latinos” in the United States has not only increased the presence of students and academics of Hispanic background throughout its academic institutions but has also increased their economic and political clout within the community. This condition is also tied to the major shifts in the approaches of these studies due to the work Edward Said introduced into the American academy, conceived through the adoption of post–Cold War postmodernist positions. The increased interest in the multiplicity of Latin America’s voices is part of a phenomenon of questioning singular narratives and was made possible through the dissolution of the ghosts of communism that lurked behind any pretense of autonomy by Latin Americans of the south from their northern Anglo-Saxon cousins.

I think that these are the new conditions in which this book is written and published. But as I said at the beginning of this brief text, I also believe that as a development of these new conditions, its publication allows us to begin to imagine a near future when these kinds of approaches will no longer be fostered or necessary.

By their very definition, approaches such as this one cannot lose, despite all precautions, an adjectival condition. In other words, the canon of modern architecture is not constituted geographically. The emergence of geographic (or regional) constructions is contradictory to the very notion of modernity within which the idea of universality is implicit. It is, in any case, an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms: if an architecture is modern, it cannot be regional. Or if you prefer: the more regional something is, the less modern it is. Beyond the many attempts to contradict this principle, regional architecture cannot be modern because to be regional it must introduce elements (from the past, from the place, or from its traditions) that make it ineligible for the requirement of the *tabula rasa*, the imperative of the always-already new that is a fundamental attribute of modernity. In other words, the idea of a modern architecture of *a certain place* is theoretically inadmissible. A work, an idea, a design belongs or does not belong to the universe of modernity regardless of the place where or the circumstances under which it was conceived or created. Now, if this statement is correct, then it only makes sense to place that work, idea, or design, in terms of its intrinsic value as a modern work, idea, or design, within the vertical coordinate of time and the horizontal coordinate that entails values. Its location in the perpendicular coordinate of the place only makes sense in relation to events or to an axiology outside of architecture.

Having said that, my statement about the near and very plausible end to the narratives about “architecture in Latin America” can be understood. To write a book such as this, or like the others that, for a while, will probably still need to be produced, can only be understood because the works, ideas, or events described in it have not been integrated into the international canon. That lack of integration is pathetic when sections devoted to “Latin America” are added to the classical texts on the history of modern architecture as if the works, projects, or ideas generated in Latin America were not part of the general development of modern architecture. And if we accept this absurd distortion of the real and complex construction mechanisms of culture, it is because that historiographical fabrication has been imposed on us with the very strength that its ownership within the general dynamics of North Atlantic hegemony has given it over the global phenomenon of modernization. With the arrogance

that feeds on that ownership, the main perpetrators of these classic texts have been allowed to build their global stories with surprising (and extremely insulting) ignorance of the characteristics and stories that took place beyond their European or U.S. provinces. Only one or, in the best of cases, a couple of trips and interviews were needed so they could include in their books some chapter or mention of works or ideas originating in Latin America.

The presumption underlying this attitude was, needless to say, that Latin America was an area of pure derivation or perhaps of the bizarre—and certainly wrong—development of proposals that originated in those provinces of the world it calls its center. The idea of “influence” was based on that presumption. But after Mikhail Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, Emmanuel Levinas, or Tzvetan Todorov, it is no longer possible to continue to emphasize the single directionality of the relationships of meaning. “Dialogic,” “the other within us,” “speech over listening,” or “heteroglossia” are concepts that have dismantled this alleged unidirectionality and have taught us to conceive of culture as a construction of multiple agents and of crossed signals. In the following book, these agents and crossing planes are clearly present, and, no less clearly, one can see the power of the inner dynamics of cultural construction. And it is that same emergence of cultural construction that makes us expect that the works and ideas composing it can find their place in the future construction of a truly global history of modern architecture—a history that will not only include these examples and processes, but also one whose own canonical structure will be understood as a result of that multiplicity of actors and signals. To move toward this new history, the book that Carranza and Lara have so carefully constructed and so adequately articulated will no doubt be an excellent instrument. Henceforth, the excuse of an insufficient dissemination platform and of the difficulties in accessing information about the complex picture of modern architecture in Latin America will no longer be acceptable.

From now on, whoever intends to reorganize tout court the knowledge about the development and evolution of modern architecture can no longer use a few clichés about what has been produced in the region. The vastness, interest, diversity, ideological intensity, and originality of the enormous process of collective creation that modernization mobilized in the region will be here, from now on, for all to see.

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