

# ReVista

HARVARD REVIEW OF LATIN AMERICA SPRING | SUMMER 2010

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## ARCHITECTURE



# Beyond Buildings

Many a year ago, when I first came to work at DRCLAS, I hosted a summer intern from South Carolina. She was even newer to Cambridge than I was.

On her first day at work, I sent her to mail a FedEx package, instructing her that the drop box was in the lobby of the “really ugly building two blocks down the street.”

She came back defeated. “I looked all around, and I couldn’t find a FedEx box in the ugly building,” she said.

I pressed her for more details. It turns out that her ugly building was the Swedenborg Chapel, a stone gothic revival building that I happen to admire, while mine was across the street: William James Hall, architect Minoru Yamasaki’s 1963 high-rise which Robert Bell Rettig describes in *Guide to Cambridge Architecture* as “fourteen stories of pure white concrete.”

I should have known better than to describe a building in such a subjective way (even though I still think it’s the ugliest building on campus). Buildings may be made of stone, concrete, glass, steel or bamboo. But in the end, they are architectural creations, acts of imagination, that are viewed in very different ways. Buildings are subjective.

Their very presence helps shape society. The way buildings are viewed, how they are built and who builds them can become ideological battlefield. In my life as a foreign correspondent, I’ve witnessed many fierce debates that ultimately are debates about what buildings represent and how they create a concept of community: should a dictator’s house be torn down or turned into a Culture Ministry? (Nicaragua); should a modern palace—replacing another that was seen as a symbol of Prussian imperialism—be torn down to make way for a partial reconstruction of the original baroque one? (Berlin); should public libraries be designed for poor neighborhoods? (Bogotá).

It was in Colombia that I first discovered how buildings shape the lived environment. The buildings of Rogelio Salmona interweave with the fabric of the society, whether in social housing, public buildings or luxury dwellings. In Nicaragua, I discovered what it meant to have a city literally disappear, its buildings tumbled by an earthquake and never rebuilt. I also learned that solutions are not always easy. City dwellers with peasant roots did not like the Sandinistas’ East German-influenced clean but sterile apartment dwellings that had no gardens and no space for chickens.

It’s not just buildings that shape society, but the parks and playgrounds that surround them, that carve out outdoor living space and centers for interaction, as both Flavio Janches and Anita Berrizbeitia so eloquently explain in this issue.

In so many places where I’ve lived as a correspondent, war, revolution, social upheaval and natural disasters have shaped the way cities are lived in and built. I was recently in the lovely colonial city of Antigua in Guatemala, originally the capital city of the country. After a major earthquake in 1776, the capital was moved to Guatemala City. A friend remarked, “I’m glad there was an earthquake then, because as a capital city, Antigua would have lost its charm.” I had never thought of that.

Major disasters like the recent earthquakes in Haiti and Chile give architects and urban planners an unusual opportunity to think about the meaning of their buildings and green spaces. Oscar Grauer draws on his extensive experience rebuilding Venezuela’s littoral to give us some thoughts on Haiti; Pablo Allard gives us an incisive view on how a small town was rebuilt in Chile after a volcanic eruption.

As I walk to work every day, I pass the Harvard Graduate School of Design. As I peeped into a large glassed-in auditorium this morning, I saw that students were looking at slides of buildings. It’s not just buildings, I wanted to tell them; think about the way that all those buildings have shaped all those lives.



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A collage of Brazilian architecture, photos by James Brown and unknown photographer, courtesy of Instituto Moreira Salles Archive



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# HISTORY

From the earliest pre-Columbian edifices to the plazas of Spanish and Portuguese colonial cities to towering urban skyscrapers, distinct architectural styles contribute to our images of Latin American history. This section provides glimpses into the story of how modern Latin American architecture has shaped society and its spaces.

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# Havana Modern

## Envisioning a 20th Century Preservation District **BY LELAND COTT**

**WHEN YOU THINK OF HAVANA AND ARCHITECTURE, YOU MAY ENVISION** Old Havana's restored colonial buildings. Through the notable efforts of the Office of the City Historian, hundreds of structures have been preserved, not as a museum, but reused as a living part of the city and its economy. Yet because of the 50-year old U.S. embargo that dampened construction, Havana is an outdoor museum of architectural styles.

Havana's international reputation as an intact Spanish Colonial city is so pervasive that few realize it was primarily constructed in the first half of the 20th century. Some of the best examples of Latin American mid-20th century modern architecture are to be found in Havana.

*Modern* is a (somewhat loose) term that I feel works well to distinguish Havana post 1950s buildings from the other two strong periods of architecture, colonial and Art Deco, which you will also experience in Havana streets. The term *modern* in this context describes the period after the Art Deco and Streamline movements of the 1930s and 1940s into a more contemporary mode as defined by the new International Style founded in Europe.

Havana's most notable modern buildings have remained relatively unchanged since their initial construction. The economic forces of real estate development, which long ago would have demolished similar buildings in other cities, have been denied access to Havana. However, this ironically fortuitous situation is likely to end when U.S. travel restrictions ease and the embargo is eventually lifted. At this point in time, it is critical

in New York City, *Latin American Architecture Since 1945*. It was then that Hitchcock introduced a selected group of Cuba's avant-garde modernists—Max Borges, Jr., Aquiles Capablana, Antonio Quintana Simonetti and Gustavo Moreno López—to his largely Eurocentric North American audience. Other important architects of the time, omitted in MoMA's exhibition and publication, included Rafael de Cárdenas, Manuel Copado, Manuel Gutiérrez and most notably Eugenio Batista, Junco, Gastón y Domínguez and Mario Romañach. Within the next ten years, others names such as Vittorio Garatti, Mario Girona, Roberto Gottardi, Frank Martínez, Ricardo Porro and Nicolás Quintana would become more well-known throughout the hemisphere. A surprising number of notable architects practiced during these two decades of the 1940s and 1950s, especially considering Cuba's size.

Now is the time to recognize Cuba's modernist architectural and planning heritage. Nowhere is this more critical than the early 20th century neighborhood of Vedado and, most notably, the mid-century seven-block stretch of 23rd Street known as "La Rampa."

La Rampa was an important tourist entertainment and nightclub center in pre-revolutionary Havana when the street prospered, growing well into the 1960s. It was a modest version New York's Times Square without the billboards and of Los Angeles's Sunset Strip of the 1960s without the traffic. Today a quieter version of La Rampa remains, but it is still a vital activity center, with many clubs, restaurants and hotels. Most importantly, it has not lost its excitement and remains a vibrant urban district.

La Rampa's distinctively modern character emerges through a small group of buildings, each excellent in its own way, and contained within Vedado's strong planning armature. It is a place of great urban design and architectural strength, with great potential as a tourist venue that has not yet been seriously exploited by Cuban authorities. They are not unaware of the treasure: Cuban scholars Eduardo Luis Rodríguez and Mario Coyula (a former Robert F. Kennedy Visiting Professor at Harvard), have written about the need to preserve parts of Vedado. Coyula and I taught a 2002 design studio here at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, which culminated with the publication *La Rampa, Envisioning a 20th Century Modern Preservation District*. That book concluded that the preservation and revitalization of this uniquely modern street—with its collection of many outstanding buildings, bus shelters, artist-designed sidewalks and natural topography—could have a transformative effect on Havana by becoming its second defining image

**Havana's international reputation is as an intact Spanish colonial city. Few realize that it was primarily constructed in the first half of the 20th century.**

that the Cuban authorities, particularly the Office of the City Historian, recognize the historical significance of Havana's outstanding works of the mid-20th century.

The Cuban modern movement had its roots in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but reached its zenith in the 1940s and 1950s. Modernism had always been embraced in Latin America, as Henry-Russell Hitchcock documented in his seminal 1955 exhibit and publication for the Museum of Modern Art



La Rampa

as a 20th century city, alongside that of its well known Colonial patrimony.

The first modern era work of architectural significance constructed on La Rampa was the 1947 **Radiocentro** building designed by Junco, Gastón and Domínguez. This building, revolutionary in its time, was the first mixed-use large scale structure in Havana with three distinct parts— a cinema on the corner of La Rampa and L Street, an office building along La Rampa and a television studio building at the M Street corner. The curved theatre marquee takes its form from the L Street corner before re-emerging on the La Rampa side as a thin-shell undulating canopy that defines the first floor retail spaces. This is a brilliant architectural component of the building leading the user to the second retail level above La Rampa itself as the slope of the street drops away. This urban design solution was used a decade later in the design of the Havana Hilton Hotel. The Radiocentro Building is a keystone of modern Havana and of La Rampa. As such it is worthy of landmark designation. Along with the Havana Libre Hotel across the street, it is the center of gravity of modern Havana.

The **Viguma Real Estate Co.** building, two blocks west of the Radiocentro on La Rampa and J Street, is a mixed-use apartment and retail structure designed by Benavent and Malinovski in 1950. Its main façade skillfully employs a vertical Art Deco element on the upper left façade juxtaposed against a strong horizontal two-story curved building façade. This is a highly sophisticated example of early modern Havana urban design that was surely a precedent for the multi-level 1950s retail facades all along La Rampa down to the Malecón. An elegantly proportioned modern stair and rail at the corner contribute to the overall design excellence of this building.

The 1953 **Ondontological** building, now the Havana University School of Economics, near the corner of L and 21st Street, was designed by Quintana, Rubio and Perez Beato and is the first of architect Antonio Quintana's La Rampa high-rise buildings. The small ground floor with retail space and the building lobby provides two spectacular surprises for the visitor. The first is a beautifully designed concrete stair that is designed to appear to float in space. The second is the impressive 1952 Mariano Rodríguez fresco, *El Dolor Humano*.



The 1947 Radiocentro building displays a curved marquee that takes its form from the street corner at L Street before re-emerging on the La Rampa side as a thin-shell undulating canopy with a projecting horizontal beam fixed at one end (what we architects call “cantilevered”) that defines the first floor retail spaces.



The Viguma Real Estate Co. building, a mixed-use apartment and retail structure, is raised on *pilotis*, in the style of Le Corbusier, that break through at the upper floor to visibly support the concrete canopy covering the roof deck. At the sidewalk the façade sets back to expose a lower and upper retail floor.



The Ondontological building was awarded the 1956 Gold Medal of the Cuban College of Architects; its façades remind one of Le Corbusier’s brise-soleil structures.



The Seguro Médico building features colored ceramic tile balcony walls alternating at each floor with wooden slats known as louvers to admit air and reject rain. Its architectural form is strongly reminiscent of the 1952 Lever House by New York City firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill and the 1952 Edificio Polar in Caracas, Venezuela by Martín Vegas Pacheco and José Miguel Galia.





The 1958 Havana Hilton (renamed the Havana Libre after the revolution) can be viewed from nearly all of western Havana. Yet, the tower has a surprisingly minimal impact on the immediate neighborhood. By setting the tower back from the edge of the pedestal, the architects were able to provide a dramatic series of cantilevered roof structures that align with the parapets of the neighboring structures; the ultimate effect being that one is hardly aware of the 27-story tower that is set back at the upper level far behind the actual entrance from the porte cochere.

The 1956 **Seguro Medico** building, on the corner of La Rampa and N Street, was Quintana, Rubio and Perez Beato's second La Rampa high rise and winner of another Gold Medal from the Cuban College of Architects. Because of its prominent site and strong composition, the Seguro Medico building is one of the more dominant buildings along the street. The 24-story tower has three distinct uses with retail at the pedestrian level, office space on the lower five stories and residential apartments on the upper floors. The office space, entered through a first floor lobby on La Rampa, features a classic 1950s cantilevered canopy that penetrates the building façade into the lobby. The original ceramic tile mural was executed by Wifredo Lam, Cu-



The 1963 open-air Cuban Pavilion is entirely built of pre-cast concrete in a deliberately referential manner of traditional Cuban wooden design and construction. The design further reveals the undisturbed topography, evident under its flat coffered concrete roof.

ba's most famous contemporary artist. A free-standing concrete stair to the second floor is located adjacent to the entry doors. The lobby to the apartments above is entered around the corner on N Street and is decorated by another beautiful ceramic wall mural, this one by Mariano Rodriguez.

The 1958 Havana Hilton (renamed the **Havana Libre** after the revolution) was designed by the Los Angeles firm, Welton Becket and Associates, with the Cuban firm of Arroyo y Menéndez. This 415-foot tower with 630 rooms on 27 floors has physical prominence and high visibility from nearly all of Western Havana because of its location on the hillside at the boundary of central Havana and the Vedado district. In spite of its size and location, the tower has a surprisingly minimal impact on the immediate neighborhood. The Havana Libre sits astride La Rampa and occupies a full city block between La Rampa and 25th Street and L and M Streets. Its shopping arcade is three stories taller on the lower end due to the sloping site. The architects placed the tower structure on a wide pedestal, a signature Hilton feature of the 1950's intended to create separation from the street; and to provide a level platform for the pool and cabanas above and an organizing line for the retail shops below. The vehicular and pedestrian entries appear as an extension of La Rampa onto the site, thus connecting the building to the street. The Havana Hilton provides valuable lessons for future large scale architectural interventions in Havana.

The 1963 open-air **Cuban Pavilion**, at the corner of 23rd and M Street, was the last of the period structures built along La Rampa. Designed by Juan Campos and Lorenzo Medrano to house the 6th Congress of the International Union of Architects, the building is entirely built of pre-cast concrete in a deliberately referential manner of traditional Cuban wooden design and



construction. The design further reveals the undisturbed topography, evident under its flat coffered concrete roof.

Each of these six individually noteworthy buildings are joined by a second tier of important structures that complete the proposed La Rampa 20th century Modern Preservation District. Included is the 1947 six-story **N Street Apartments** building, near the corner of 21st and N Street, designed by Junco, Gastón and Domínguez in the same year as their Radiocentro building; the 1948 11-story **Ambar Motors** building, constructed on the corner of La Rampa and the Malecón, by Cuban businessman Amadeo Barletta for General Motors; **The Capri Hotel**, 1953, designed by José Canaves Ugalde at M and 21st Street; the former **Boleras Tony** building, 1955 (now the La Rampa Theater) designed by Gustavo Botet at La Rampa and O Street; and the futuristic **La Copelia** ice-cream pavilion, 1966, designed by Mario Girona at La Rampa and L Street. Although not technically a part of the modernist genre within the La Rampa neighborhood, **The Hotel Nacional**, 1930, at the Malecón between La Rampa and 19th Street, designed by the American firm of McKim, Mead and White deserves inclusion with the proposed district.

**Now is the time to recognize Cuba's modernist heritage. Nowhere is this more critical than in the early 20th century neighborhood of El Vedado, especially in the 7-block "La Rampa."**

When taken as a group of 12 structures, this proposed preservation district contains lessons for architects, planners and historians in much the same way as Colonial Old Havana. Each are recognized as being outstanding examples of their period and each has a particular place in the history of mid-century modern Havana. Now is the time to intervene and advocate for their restoration and continued protection. The La Rampa mid-20th century Modern Preservation District would be like no other in the world.

*Leland Cott is a founding principal of Bruner/Cott Architects and Planners in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and an Adjunct Professor of Urban Design at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. His recent design studio class, titled Havana in our Time: Developing Urban Design and Planning Strategies for Change, studied the likely effects of the end of the embargo upon Havana's built environment. Most recently, he was a co-leader of a joint Cuban/American preservation effort to restore Ernest Hemingway's home outside of Havana.*

## A Tale of Three Buildings

**Brazil's Estado Novo** BY BRUNO CARVALHO

GREEK COLUMNS, IN THOMAS JEFFERSON'S DESIGNS FOR THE UNIVERSITY of Virginia, might evoke democracy. In Albert Speer's designs for Berlin during the Third Reich, similar columns serve to project imperial power. Perhaps more so than other art forms, architecture faces that paradox: outside of their historical contexts, very similar buildings or design elements can signify very different things. In a sense, this paradox is even more present in Latin America, where architecture has stood at the crossroads of ideological battles through much of the 20th century.

In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's capital until the inauguration of Brasília in 1960, architectural design keenly reflected both local political pressures and the country's aspired place on the world stage. One of the most top-down, orchestrated examples was the construction of the Avenida Central (now known as the Avenida Rio Branco), from 1904-1906. Inspired by Haussmann's 19th century reforms in Paris, Rio's own urban intervention was in some ways born outdated. Its façades, variations on the French Eclecticism of the École des Beaux-Arts, would be considered old-fashioned within a little over a decade of their construction.

In the 1930s, a new generation of Brazilian architects were at the forefront of architectural modernity, exuding confidence and determined not to lag behind the newest trends. The design team for the fourteen-story building that was to host the Ministry of Health and Education (later, the Ministry of Education and Culture, or MEC), an organ created during the Getúlio Vargas regime, included Lúcio Costa, Affonso Eduardo Reidy, and Oscar Niemeyer, who would go on to become some of the country's most influential architects. The building, completed in 1942 but only inaugurated in 1945, was located on the site of the leveled Castelo Hill landmark. It was among the first to incorporate bold elements of the International Style—reinforced concrete, pilotis, and a shading system known as *brise-soleil*. The use of Cândido Portinari's modernist *azulejos* (traditional painted ceramic tile-work) made reference to Portuguese heritage. Although the extent of Le Corbusier's direct role in the final design has been the object of controversy, his influence remains undeniable.

Another two buildings, which have received considerably less attention from architectural historians, are just as crucial to understanding what University of Maryland historian Daryle Williams terms "culture wars" in his book *Culture Wars in Brazil*. These internal tensions pervaded Brazil's political and social life from 1937 to 1945—the period of Getúlio Vargas' authoritarian *Estado Novo*. The buildings were designed to face the monumental Avenida Presidente Vargas, and were inaugurated in

1944, at the same time as the avenue. The two neighboring skyscrapers, though, share certain architectural elements that immediately set them apart from the MEC, which stood on the other side of downtown Rio, towards the bay. Like the MEC, both of these imposing projects were commissioned by the state, were widely covered by the press, and sought to project the image of a modern nation. The three buildings, however, embodied competing versions of what modernity meant.

The monumental designs for the buildings facing the new avenue no longer took their cues almost exclusively from architecture based in France. Brazilian urban historian Evelyn Furquim Werneck Lima suggests the influence of Hugh Ferriss' *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* (1929), which conceives of numerous tower-edifices resembling Mesopotamian towers known as ziggurats for the business district of Manhattan (*Avenida Presidente Vargas: uma drástica cirurgia*).

In his designs for the Quartel General do Exército (now known as the Palácio Duque de Caxias) Cristiano Stockler das Neves, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, sought to ally the Beaux-Arts classic spirit with practical aims developed by North Americans. The building, planned and built before Brazil joined the Allies on August 22, 1942, also has elements bearing great similarity to projects by Albert Speer and Wilhelm Kreis in Third Reich Germany, reminders of the *Estado Novo*'s ideological affinities to the Axis Powers. The imposing symmetric spatial arrangement of its façade—vast ten-story wings on both sides of a twenty-three story tower building—were meant to evoke a general marching in front of his divisions. The layout and position of the building in relation to the avenue take into account its use as a stage for military parades—a function highlighted by weeklies with nationwide distribution in their Independence Day spreads, which covered the very first parades after Brazil's official entrance into the war. The *Revista da Semana* and *O Malho*, distributed throughout the

country, dedicated several pages to photographs of marching soldiers, with the building's massive façade and tower frequently in the background.

Right beside the Army Headquarters, the new main railway station Central do Brasil certainly seems to echo its neighbor through the iconic tower, scale and use of similar materials. Begun in March 1936, the building's design was altered during the *Estado Novo* to dramatically increase its proportions and monumentality, ending up with an Art Déco tower of twenty-nine floors upon its inauguration on March 29, 1943. Adorned on its four faces with enormous clocks spanning six of the top floors, the new building was Rio de Janeiro's tallest skyscraper, and Brazil's second after the Edifício Martelli in São Paulo. Media coverage of the inauguration, timed to coincide with the station's 85th anniversary, highlighted the clock as one of the four largest in the world. Architects Adalberto Szilard and Geza Heller were primarily responsible for the final design, a modification on Roberto de Carvalho's original project.

All three buildings seem to embody the Vargas regime's vision for a new, modern nation, drawing on different versions of progress in various architectural forms. The buildings were intended for major institutional functions: the national army, transportation (and indirectly, industrial labor—represented by the clock), education and health. Official rhetoric—particularly in regards to the avenue—attempted to insert the constructions within discourses of the Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda (Department of Press and Propaganda, or DIP). The goal was to substitute the culture of *malandragem* and bohemianism with the exaltation of discipline, highlighting a work ethic. The echoes are clear in the language of the press. For example, the April 10, 1943 *Revista da Semana* celebrates the new Central Station as a “brilliant demonstration of labor and of progress.”

In the following year, similar terms would be employed during the official inauguration of the Avenida Presidente

Vargas. In a period when the World War dominated the front pages of newspapers, the September 3rd, 1944, edition of the newspaper *A Manhã*, directed by the modernist writer Cassiano Ricardo, dedicated its prime spot to a picture of the new avenue and buildings, under the heading “it will be one of the greatest avenues in the world!” The caption read: “one of the most important in the universe [...], it will give to the city features worthy of its grand nature.”

The portrayals of the three major buildings in the tightly-controlled press clearly favored the version of architectural modernity represented by the Army Headquarters and the Central do Brasil. As early as September 1937 (the month of Brazil's independence day) the *Revista da Semana* published the project for “The New Palace of War,” along with photographs of the president and other authorities laying down the foundation stone. In the pages of that same publication, the nearly ubiquitous advertisements for the brain tonic “Neurobiol” contained images like an executive working, with similarly ziggurat-styled skyscrapers in the background, and the announcement: “In the maelstrom of modern life, victory belongs to the strong brains!”

On the other hand, newspapers initially condemned the slow pace and high costs of the MEC building, as Zilah Quezado Deckker shows in *Brazil built: the architecture of the modern movement in Brazil*. In a time of war, criticism of the building as a “Palace of Luxury” must have resonated in particularly negative ways with the reading public. But then, New York MoMa architect Philip Goodwin praised the MEC as the “most advanced building in America” on a visit to Rio with the architectural writer George Everard Kidder-Smith. The tide began to turn. Nonetheless, while a headline in the July 2, 1942 edition of *A Notícia* repeated the phrase, it also tempered the enthusiasm by referring to the construction as “long and extremely expensive” (*Longas e caríssimas as obras do Palácio do Ministério da Educação*, reproduced in Deckker, p. 189.) The MEC's prominence in the 1943



“Brazil Builds” exhibition at the MoMA and in Kidder-Smith and Goodwin’s book (*Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old, 1652-1942*), though, catapulted the building, as well as those Brazilians involved in the project, into the vanguard of architectural practice.

Although the MEC design’s version of modernity “won” and remained, in a sense becoming canonized even before its inauguration as the ministry’s office building, in a historical context the MEC’s design did not signify modernity or progress any more than the new architecture of the Presidente Vargas Avenue. An argument could be made that the Avenue’s and the MEC’s respective buildings responded to antagonistic currents within Getúlio

Vargas’s regime: one, led by the Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda, more aggressively nationalist and with totalitarian leanings; the other “softer” and more willing to compromise, centered around education minister Gustavo Capanema—whose name would be used to designate the building to host the ministry.

Today, the Central do Brasil and the Palácio Duque de Caxias might stand together not just physically but in how passersby experience them—as two iconic relics of a long-gone vision of what the future should look like. It is clear that the designs of the Central do Brasil and the Palácio Duque de Caxias were rendered to highlight the effects produced by the avenue’s open spaces. The version

**A view down the avenue: the construction between the two buildings in question and the avenue was yet to be removed.**

of modernity and progress represented by the avenue and its accompanying architecture, as well as the Brazil that they sought to replace, also become clear once we consider the building’s locations. Perhaps symbolically, the Central Station has its back to the Morro da Providência, the very first of the city’s favelas. In order to allow for the new vistas, much of the neighborhood of the Cidade Nova, including its Praça Onze, had to be destroyed. The Praça Onze, a public square, had served as the epicenter of Rio’s “Little Africa”



and of a vibrant Ashkenazi Jewish neighborhood. It had also hosted the city's most popular street carnival, and figured in the collective imaginary as the "cradle of samba."

At the same time, the differences between them should not be overlooked. To invert the old adage of composition teachers, buildings might show, but they do not necessarily tell. Despite sharing certain aesthetic elements and general influences, details that can go unnoticed today can be quite revealing in the context of the 1930s and early 1940s. There is a relevant, if obvious difference in their functions—one serves as a public space, the other forbids entry to the non-authorized. One also thinks immediately of the Central do Brasil's ribbon windows, which simultaneously evoke industrial architecture, give an impression of openness and provide light. Ribbon windows, not coincidentally, were one of Le Corbusier's five points of new architecture

In other words, the architects involved in the pioneering design for the MEC by no means held a monopoly on elements of the International Style in Brazil. The Central do Brasil can be seen as a type of compromise among the aesthetic programs and political currents vying for control of the country's representation of itself during the Getúlio Vargas regime—at least from a historical perspective, a compromise amidst "culture wars." When it comes to architecture, it is perhaps the case that politics, like beauty, lies in the eyes of the beholder.

**Bruno Carvalho** received his Ph.D. in Romance Languages and Literatures from Harvard University, and is an Assistant Professor at Princeton's Department of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Cultures. He is finishing a manuscript on the cultural history of the *Cidade Nova* in Rio de Janeiro, tentatively entitled 'So Brazil': Cultural Spaces of an Afro-Jewish Brazilian Neighborhood.

# Brasilia

## A Century-old Purpose, Always Postponed

BY FARÈS EL-DAHDAH

**DISLOCATING THE CAPITAL TO BRAZIL'S INTERIOR** highlands is a long standing project in the country's history. The project was first linked to the transfer of the royal court from Lisbon to Portuguese America, where a metropolis would be established in what until then had been a colonial purveyor of goods. The transfer brought into question the very geography of an empire made of dominions in three continents and it often questioned Rio de Janeiro's suitability, be it as a royal, imperial, or republican capital.

Until 1953, the quest for a worthy capital involved many factors such as the establishment of a Portuguese empire in the Americas, Portugal's repudiation of an *Ancien Régime* monarchy in the South Atlantic, the formation of a counter hegemony in a former colony, or in the construction of a unified, republican, and modern Brazilian nation. As Lucio Costa—the architect of the final iteration of Brazil's new capital—once put it: "it was a century-old purpose, always postponed."

One of the earliest references to the transfer of the Portuguese court away from Lisbon and across the Atlantic occurred during the reign of Dom João IV (1640-1656) when due to Portugal's fragility in the context of Spain's enmity, an escape plan was hatched whereby the Portuguese royal family would, pending imminent threat, flee to the Brazilian captaincy of Pernambuco. A similar plan was suggested in 1736 by the diplomat Luís da Cunha. Portugal could only prosper, he believed, if the king moved to a land that offered all the resources he needed, while "in no way he needed those of Portugal." By 1750, the formation of an economically integrated Luso-Brazilian empire became a political program and by 1797, the Secretary of Naval Affairs and Overseas Dominions, Rodrigo de

Souza Coutinho, proposed an official redistribution of the empire. His fear was that "left by itself," Portugal "would in a brief period become a province of Spain." By 1803, Souza Coutinho's views of Portugal "as neither the best nor the most essential part of the monarchy" proved as unpopular as they were premonitory. In 1807, a showdown between France and Britain over the Iberian peninsula took place. Prince Regent Dom João VI fled, along with his court, from the threat of Napoleon's invading army by sailing across the Atlantic under British protection. Having chosen a port city for what, after all, had always been a maritime nation, the Portuguese court was faced with the need to transform Rio de Janeiro into a 'New Lisbon' and, in the process, divest Portuguese America from its colonial identity. Dom João VI had, however, found Rio de Janeiro ill-suited for the royal family and regretted not having sufficient resources to transfer his capital inland, or so reported the British ambassador, Lord Strangford, to his king, George III.

Among the first to publicly debate an opinion in favor of transferring the capital inland was the exiled journalist Hipólito José da Costa, editor of *Correio Braziliense*, published between 1808 and 1822. From his exile in London, José da Costa perpetuated the idea of a 'Brazil-centric' Portuguese world and went so far as to find Rio de Janeiro "appropriate for commerce and other ends yet summarily inadequate as Brazil's capital." Citing the example of Washington D.C., José da Costa added that whatever difficulties exist in building a city from scratch far inland are "mere subterfuge," considering "the facility with which cities are built in the United States of Northern America."

With Napoleon's defeat in 1815, Dom



**Lucio Costa holding a topographer's flag during his first visit to the new capital's construction site, 1957.**

João VI preferred not to return to Portugal. A year later, he promoted Brazil to the status of kingdom, thereby becoming king of a dual monarchy. This measure stood in the way of Oporto's and Lisbon's bourgeoisies, which sought to recuperate the hegemony they once held over the colonies. Protest led to the 1820 Liberal Revolution of Oporto, and the king was 'ordered' by the Revolutionary Assembly (i.e., the *Côrtes*) to bring the Royal Court back to mainland Portugal. Dom João VI could no longer risk losing his continental dominion and on April 21, he finally departed for Lisbon, leaving behind his heir-apparent, Prince Pedro, who became regent of the Vice-Kingdom of Brazil.

When the revolutionary delegates from Brazil to the *Côrtes* in Lisbon were cast aside in negotiations regarding the new Portuguese Constitution, they offered an amendment of their own, wherein Article 1 not only locates a capital in the "center

of Brazil," it also mentions the name of "Brasília." On September 21, 1821, with only a portion of the Brazilian delegates present, the *Côrtes* voted to abolish the Kingdom of Brazil, effectively stripping Rio de Janeiro of its royal privileges while subordinating all Brazilian provinces back to Lisbon. A few days later, the *Côrtes* ordered the return of Prince Pedro who, faced with such intransigence, not only pronounced his famous "*Fico*" ("I stay") address but subsequently declared Brazil free from Lisbon's liberal revolutionaries, promised a separate constitutional monarchy, and named himself Dom Pedro I, Emperor of Brazil.

One of the principal protagonists in the installation of Dom Pedro I's government was José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva, who had been the only Brazilian delegate in Lisbon equipped with a territorial program that sought to unify Brazil's disparate and quasi-independent

provinces (independent from each other, that is). While addressing Brazil's Constitutional Assembly, on June 9, 1823, Andrada e Silva reiterated the reasons why a new capital would be both "useful and necessary," suggesting the names of "Petropole or Brasília," locating it along the southern latitude of 15 degrees. In 1825, the newspaper *O Universal* (published in Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais) featured an article in favor of a liberal immigration policy that would bring together "peoples of different political and religious opinions," much as other countries such as the United States had. The article mentions the necessity to build a city in the country's interior which would in time become the capital.

With the return of Dom Pedro I to Portugal to claim his father's throne, it was now up to Dom Pedro II to consolidate Brazil's geopolitical territory. A young Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen—who would eventually become his country's principal 19th century historian—greatly contributed to the formation of an independent, albeit imperial, identity. The theme of the new capital's location would recur throughout his life. Only a few months prior to his death in 1877, Varnhagen undertook an exploratory expedition in Brazil's highlands and demarcated the capital's location within a triangle formed by the three lagoons of Formosa, Feia and Mestre d'Armas.

With the advent of the Republic in 1889, concerns for salubrity, national security and territorial integrity became the principle tropes around which the need for a new capital was from then on argued. The new regime made it clear that Rio de Janeiro would only be the provisional seat of federal power. Under Article 3 of the 1891 Republican Constitution, the Union was granted a yet to be demarcated area equal to 5,560 square miles deep in the country's interior. A law was also passed in May 1892 to create the



Members of the Cruls Commission, 1892.

Comissão Exploradora do Planalto Central led by the director of Rio de Janeiro's astronomic observatory and professor of geodesy and astronomy at the *Escola Superior de Guerra*—the Belgian-born Luiz Cruls. Equipped with theodolites, aneroid barometers, compasses, pedometers, meteorological instruments, cameras, guns and tents, Cruls also took along with him astronomers, medical officers, a pharmacist, a geologist and a botanist. The expedition began in June 1892 and lasted until March 1893. The actual location proposed by Cruls (along lines of latitude between 15 and 16 degrees and longitude between 47 and 49 degrees) for the future Federal District coincided with the same latitude line of 15 degrees previously chosen by José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva and barely outside Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagens' triangle.

Cruls' introductory remarks in his report will ultimately define the master narrative subsequently employed by politicians and historians alike. A destiny for Brazil now had a recognizable image, which would repeatedly be legitimized as the target of successive vectors of desire, be they those of royal dislocations, republican integration, or national identity constructions. The newly demarcated Federal District thus became a symbolic national space used as a pretext for vari-

ous political purposes. It was visually represented in official maps as a charged void in the middle of the country, often labeled "*Quadrilátero Cruls*" or, simply, "Future Federal District."

The selection of the actual site for the future capital was ultimately hampered by competing government-sponsored railway projects, which diverted the expedition away from the newly demarcated Federal District. The Commission was finally dismantled in 1897 and Congress indefinitely postponed the need for further studies now that the republic seemed stable enough and no longer in need of the political currency that a capital city transfer project could yield. The project would episodically appear to no avail. It was not until the celebration of Brazil's independence centenary on September 7, 1922, that a foundational stone was laid near the town of Planaltina, well within Cruls's *Quadrilátero*. This event immediately increased Planaltina's real-estate property values, which eventually prompted local plantation owners to donate, in 1927, a portion of *Fazenda Bananal* to the municipality, in order to make it available to third party investors who would develop it in advance of the constitutionally mandated transfer project. Although the project never materialized, the foresight was incredibly accurate since, 30 years later, Brazil's capital was indeed built on the grounds of the old Bananal plantation. The idea of Planaltina as the chosen site

circulated widely enough to end up being suggested to Le Corbusier by the French artist Fernand Léger who informed the Franco-Swiss architect of Brazil's desire to build a new city from scratch in the highlands. When Le Corbusier travelled to Brazil for the first time in 1929, "Planaltina" was again invoked by him as a "dream that has been on my mind."

The revolutionary events of 1930 resulted in Getúlio Vargas taking over the presidency and putting a de facto end to the country's first republic. Brazil was now poised to assume a new identity no longer bound by a traditional vision of a state serving private oligarchic interests. The "Vargas Revolution," as it was called, sought to define a new urban Brazil wary of its national security and willing to modernize its economic, social, and administrative structures. During Vargas' first regime (1930-1937), discussions regarding the future capital occurred in reference to Brazil's geopolitical redistribution and national security. Mário Augusto Teixeira de Freitas, Director of the Ministry of Education and Public Health's Directorate of Information, Statistics and Dissemination, suggested, for example, that the Brazilian territory be subdivided into thirty "units" which would involve moving, temporarily, the capital to Belo Horizonte before finally settling it in the Cruls *Quadrilátero*—where it would adopt the name of "Ibéria" or "Lusitania."

Four years into Vargas' presidency, the National Assembly enacted a new constitution which stipulated under Article 4 of its "Transitional Dispositions" that "the Union's Capital will be transferred to a central point in Brazil." This short-lived Constitution kept alive the capital transfer idea in addition to legitimating Vargas's otherwise provisory mandate. It determined, however, that the next presidential elections would occur in 1938 and excluded the possibility of a second consecutive term. Seeing no prospect for reelection and citing communist-fearing events, Vargas led the 1937 coup d'état, which inaugurated the *Estado Novo*, a more authoritarian version of his earlier regime (1937-1945).





#### The Ministries, Esplanade and National Congress under construction

Yet another Constitution was enacted that year without, however, any mention of Brazil's future capital.

With Vargas deposed in 1945, Congress reintroduced the question of the future capital under Article 4 of the 1946 Constitution's "Transitional Dispositions." General Djalma Polli Coelho, was appointed head of a new demarcation commission, which submitted its report in 1948. The *Cruls Quadrilátero* was kept within a much wider territory equal to 297,230 square miles and the future capital would now have to be planned for a quarter million inhabitants. Polli Coelho's report was debated in Congress but it would take another five years, and the re-election of Gétúlio Vargas in 1951, before it is sanctioned by Decree Law no.1803. On January 5, 1953, Congress finally authorized the executive branch to undertake the definitive studies for the site selection and increased to half a million the new capital's population. Vargas created the Comissão de Localização da Nova Capital Federal (CLNCF) led by General Aguiinaldo Caiado de Castro who in turn contracted the U.S. firm, Donald

Belcher & Associates, for the selection of five possible sites for the future capital. The *Belcher Report* was submitted in 1955 to CLNCF's new chair, Field Marshal José Pessoa Cavalcanti de Albuquerque and among the five color-coded sites, the "castanho" site was finally chosen on April 15. The site featured temperate weather conditions, superior water quality, uninterrupted terrain, good drainage and the potential to form lakes by damming two existing rivers, Paranoá and São Bartolomeu. Cavalcanti de Albuquerque had in the previous year also created a number of advisory sub-commissions including one for 'urban planning', which proposed a city named "Vera Cruz," described as being not only "organic, monumental, political and administrative" but also based on the garden city concepts of the British urbanist Ebenezer Howard. The sub-commission sent Le Corbusier an invitation to supervise the planning of the new Brazilian capital. The "world renowned architect," as the invitation referred to him, was more than receptive to the idea. It had, after all, been "lingering" on his mind since the 1926. The Commission's president, however, opposed the participation of a "foreign urbanist" and Le Corbusier did not go further than proposing propose a five-stage process

in which he would be responsible for the city's schematic design and a "pilot plan," as he called it. The use of the novel "pilot plan" terminology came to represent Le Corbusier's only direct contribution to the final Brasília project.

Motivated by an image of industrial progress, the newly elected President in 1955, Juscelino Kubitschek, finally began implementing the project of a new capital for Brazil, which was, in essence, the perfect pretext for the building of highways, thereby creating access to hitherto unexploited areas of the country. The so called "JK era" revitalized the image of the country's modernity through architecture, which by then had become Brazil's most internationally recognized cultural production (aside from *Bossa Nova*).

A few months into his presidency, on September 24, 1956, Kubitschek approved the statute of the national development company, Companhia Urbanizadora da Nova Capital do Brasil (NOVACAP), which was given three principal responsibilities: 1) to plan and execute the localization, urbanization and construction of the future capital; to dispose of the Federal District's real-estate as foreseen by law; 2) to execute all services that are of federal, state, and municipal competence; and 3) to prac-

tice all that is required to fulfill the social objectives provided in the statute and authorized by its board. Five months later, the runway for a commercial airport was being paved and a temporary terminal built. Housing for 3,000 workers had also been erected, as were the temporary shelters for NOVACAP and its functionaries. Prior to even designing the city itself, public buildings were well underway, such as the provisory presidential residences (Catetinho 1 and Catetinho 2), the permanent presidential palace (Alvorada Palace) and a hotel (Brasilia Palace

**School children celebrating on the Plaza of the Three Powers during the inauguration ceremonies.**



Hotel). These projects had all been designed by Oscar Niemeyer who, as head of NOVACAP's Architecture and Urbanism Department, was responsible for designing the future capital's principal buildings. A national design competition was also organized for the city's "pilot plan." Of the 63 registered participants, 26 presented projects that were evaluated by the jury on March 12, 1957. The jury deliberated until March 16 when it pronounced Lucio Costa's entry as the winner. Among the other 25 entries, far more complex and detailed projects were proposed but none was able to encapsulate a variety of cultural tendencies as well as Costa's project. In pragmatic terms, it was the only entry that took into

consideration the building of the city in only three years by making clear the position, size and outline of buildings, which could plausibly be built in the middle of nowhere. Having located the footprint of all buildings, their size and their relationships, NOVACAP (i.e. Oscar Niemeyer) could subsequently take over with ease and without altering the given image of the city.

Brasilia was finally conceived, designed and built well within the five year span of Kubitschek's presidency. The construction process from start to finish took 1,310 days and its execution was the result of beliefs, ideals and the personal dedication of workers, architects, urbanists, engineers, politicians and administrators whose engagement guaranteed the project's completion in time for its inauguration on April 21, 1960. On that day, all government officials and foreign ambassadors made the trip to the event and so did thousands of people who caused the city's first traffic congestion. Festivities had, in fact, begun the day before at four in the afternoon on the Plaza of the Three Powers, where Kubitschek received the keys to the city from the head of NOVACAP, Israel Pinheiro. A mass was celebrated that night and at midnight Brasilia became Brazil's new capital. By morning, ambassadors began presenting their credentials while federal agencies began the process of their permanent installation. That evening twenty tons of fireworks were consumed while workers partied on the Plaza and dignitaries dined in tails in the presidential palace. Postponing Brazil's capital transfer project was, from then on, no longer possible.

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# A Practice in Full

An Audience with Oscar Niemeyer **BY JAMES BROWN**

OSCAR NIEMEYER'S GAZE REVEALS NOTHING AS THE TEN OF US MAKE OUR way through the throng of architecture students towards the rows of seats that fan out from his facing central chair. Loosely clasped on his lap, his gnarled hands almost seem sculpted from the strong abutments that form the escarpment of this seaside city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The thought of the works they have touched and of the history that they have helped shape make them appear more powerful than they really are. I could not help thinking about the pencils they have held, of the magnificent drawings that they have guided. He has worked and created so much for so long that he has outlived his contemporaries, both practitioners and critics. One might say that he has outlived his own context.

The now 102-year-old Niemeyer is best known for his involvement in Brasília, the capital city carved out of brush nearly 400 miles from the nearest paved road. He was asked to participate in this project by the then-president, Juscelino Kubitschek, a populist president (not unlike today's president, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, who is taking an active role with the planned 2016 Olympics). Niemeyer created most of the important buildings in Brasília, working in concert with his old boss and frequent collaborator, Lucio Costa, who laid out the master plan. He completed many of his greatest works in this former capital city, but the ambitious conceit of Brasília, some critics charged, often overshadowed the works themselves. Let us hope that Lula has learned this lesson well as the initial planning for the Olympics begins.

We ten Loeb Fellows, '09, from Harvard's Graduate School of Design, traveled to Brazil to study megacities and the effects these huge metropolises have on natural resources and social structures. We are climate change activists, photographers, philanthropic program managers, green building consultants, after school innovators, developers, artists, historic preservationists, planners and architects. Among us, there are Niemeyer admirers, skeptics, and provocateurs—we are a diverse group.

Although he may now be considered the last of the living modernists, Niemeyer has never been considered a pure modernist. He does not and has never obeyed the dictates of modernism or postmodernism (or any of the other "isms" for that

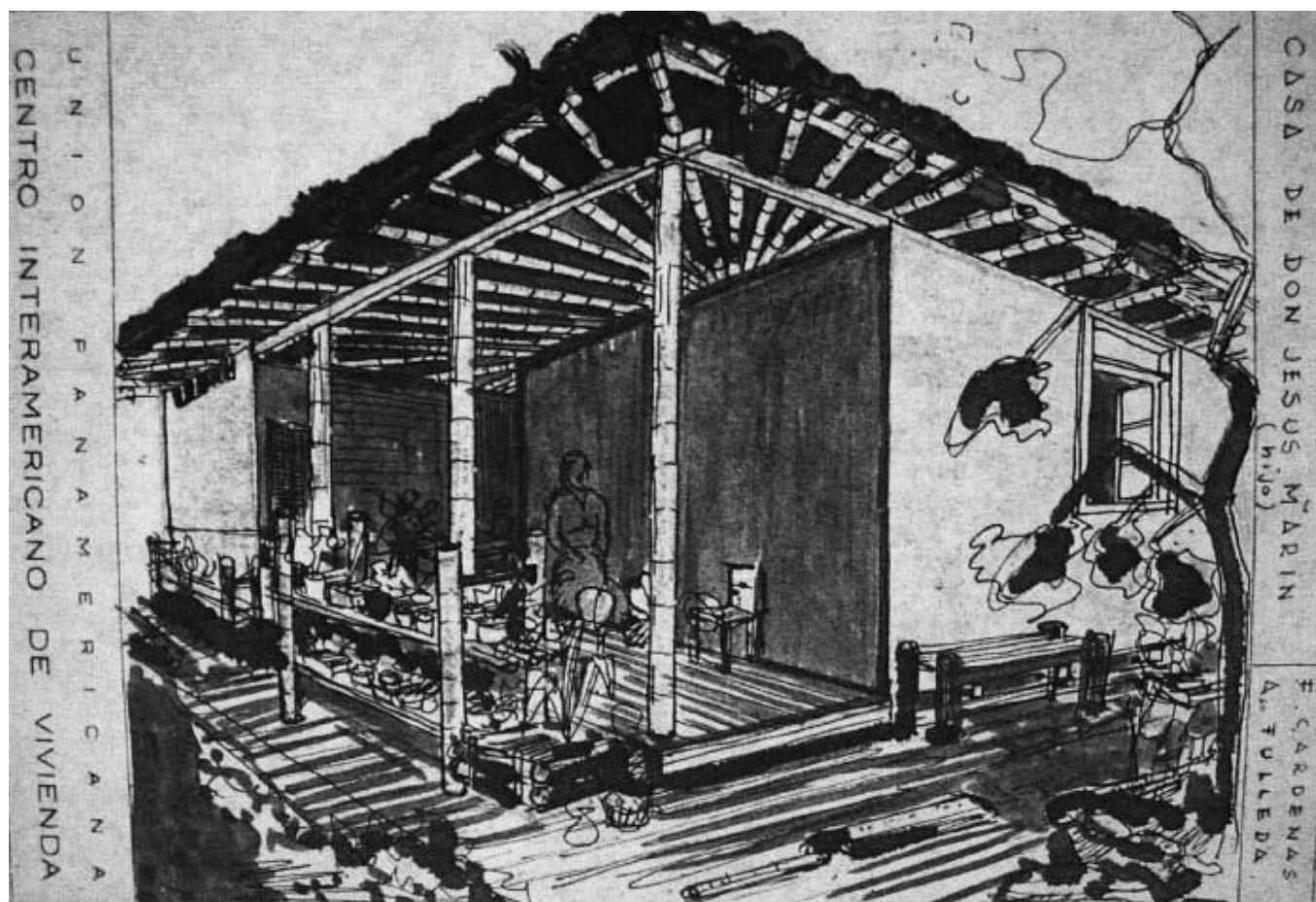
matter). It may be closer to the truth to say that he never was in vogue, then or now. He has always been an outlier, preferring his own convictions to the leanings of any group. Niemeyer values the notion of harmony between nature and building; he values human interactions within his works. Perhaps most telling, he increasingly references love itself as the essence of what architecture must be to have meaning. The world's leading architects, on the other hand, often prefer obtuse philosophical arguments to such simple ones.

While walking Rio's busy streets a day earlier, we had found ourselves in front of the powerful and balanced Ministry of Education and Health, on which Niemeyer collaborated with many of the aspiring Cariocan architects of the time. The *New York Times* described it in 1943 as "the most advanced architectural structure in the world." Indeed, it is still one of the best examples of passive design in a large structure, with its intelligent overhangs, operable shading devices, and numerous operable windows. It is a building that today's green architects would do well to emulate. In stark contrast to the groundbreaking work exhibited in the MEH, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Niterói, finished by Niemeyer's team in 1996, seems an ode to Niemeyer's past triumphs. While its quiet but commanding presence exhibits the architects' unceasing talent for artistry, the project looks backward rather than forward. It was within this conflicting framework that our group found its way to our seats.

In the course of our audience, a member of our group asked Niemeyer how his buildings respond to the need to educate the public about the dangers of dwindling resources. He responded "This is not my job description. I concern myself with architecture. I am not a politician." Indeed, he has long stated his goal in architecture is to create "surprise and enchantment." He creates beauty in an age when it is not always valued without an accompanying manifesto. It is no wonder his fellow modernists never really embraced him. Oscar Niemeyer has always had the courage to run alone.

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# Productive Workers for the Nation

## Architects, Peasants and Development in 1950s Colombia

BY RICARDO LÓPEZ-PEDREROS

IN 1954, COLOMBIAN ARCHITECT ALBERTO Valencia took a short trip to the small town of Anolaima, two hours away from Bogotá. An architect at the Inter-American Housing Center—a joint project of the Organization of American States and the U.S. Office for International Development—Valencia was excited to arrive in a “remote but attractive place” where he could find the “reality of life.”

After some days in the field, Valencia resolved to leave his books and city be-

hind. Instead, he would return to Anolaima to teach peasants “how to build [new] houses...how to build homes... how to live in community.” He wanted to know the “Colombian peasants *in person*...their families...their lives... their souls, their activities.” Above all he wanted to transform those peasants into “modern citizens of the Colombian nation” (quotations from Housing Center Archive, Alberto Valencia’s personal archive).

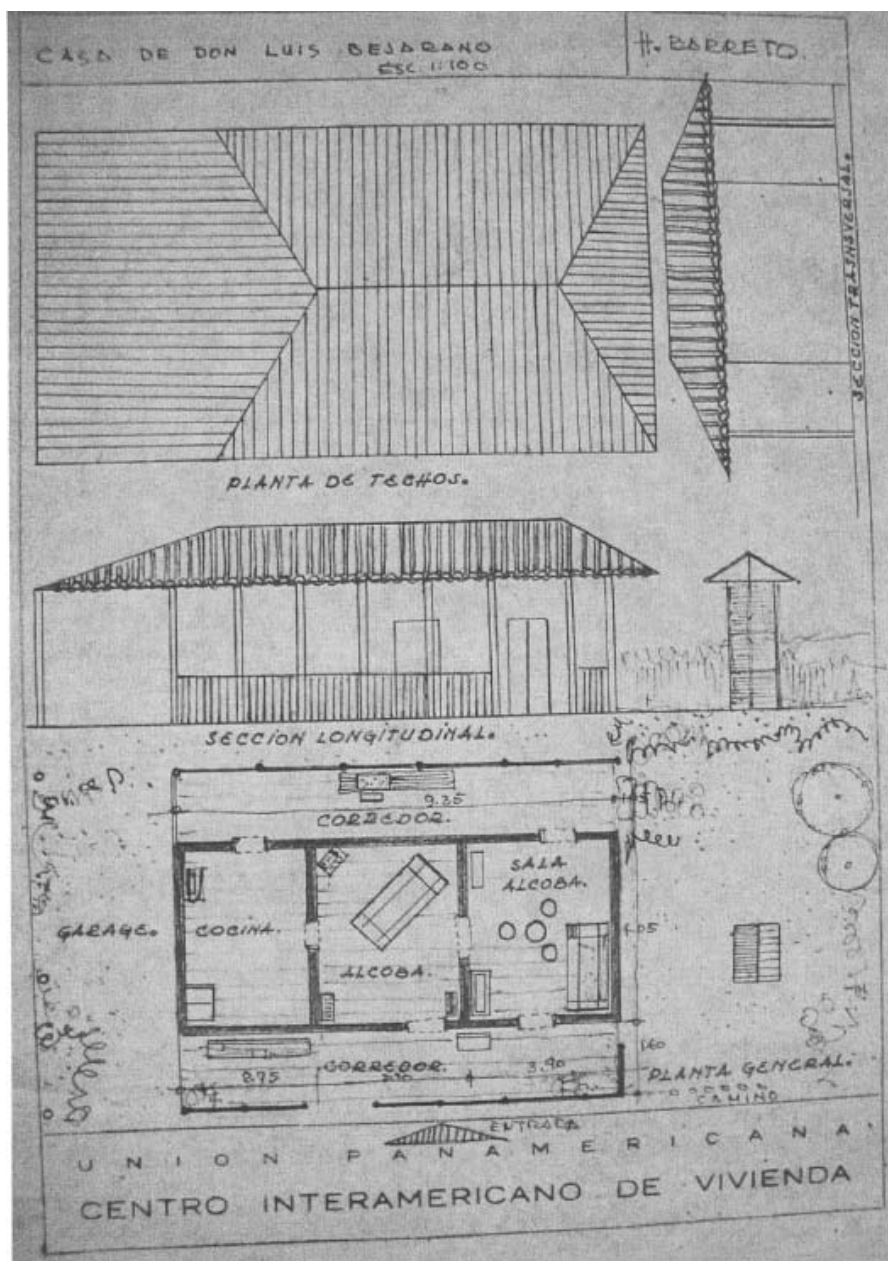
Valencia’s preoccupations and desires speak eloquently of the new roles architects and other middle-class professionals began to play in political discussions about “development” and “modernity” in post-war Colombia. As the world split into the conflicting camps of the Cold War era, state institutions and multilateral development agencies, among them U.S. foreign aid organizations, constantly discussed how the social sciences could be applied in a practical manner to creat-

**Floor plans for peasant housing in Colombia reflect the new role assigned to architecture as a social science.**

ing critical roles for professions such as architecture in achieving modernization. The goal was to move Latin America away from underdevelopment, political instability and social poverty, lifting it into what was conceived as a modern, developed, stable and democratic society.

In Colombia, policy makers, politicians, diplomats and intellectuals agreed that a new “mission” for professions such as architecture was imperative to bring *La Violencia*, a ten-year bloody conflict between Liberals and Conservatives, to a definitive end. Alberto Lleras Camargo (1958-1962) and Guillermo León Valencia (1962-1966), the two first presidents of the National Front, a 16-year power-sharing agreement between Liberals and Conservatives, wanted these new professionals to educate the working and peasant classes about how to live harmoniously and peacefully. These experiences, according to many politicians and intellectuals of the time, were foreign to the lives of Colombian citizens.

It is in this context that Alberto Valencia's preoccupations and desires make so much sense. He, as an architect, was experiencing a new role assigned to architecture as a social science. He was only one among many professionals who were hired by the Colombian state to carry out what was understood as the crucial task of the 20th century: to bring “social progress,” “modernity,” and “peace” to those who had suffered the consequences of *La Violencia*. But in order to succeed in such a difficult endeavor it was necessary to train new generations of architects. During the late 1950s and 1960s, the Inter-American Housing Center, the *Instituto de Crédito Territorial* (the main state housing agency), the National University and a group of private elite organizations worked together to implement a training program to educate a new generation of architects committed to the national common good, rather than elite mate-



rial interests. Much of this training was sponsored by the Kennedy-inspired U.S. Alliance for Progress, which founded or supported technical centers, vocational schools and universities. This training would allow a new generation of architects to perform what was conceived as a more democratic role: they would be ready to teach Colombia's rural peasantry how to overcome poverty, political passivity, violent tendencies, underdevelopment and backwardness.

Alberto Valencia's story as a modern

architect offers an insightful example on how these new professional roles assigned to architecture worked out in practice. In one of the many reports he filed for the Inter-American Housing Center, Valencia pondered the major causes of peasants' underdevelopment and low productivity. For him, these problems resulted in part from the disorganization of peasants' houses, which had merely two corridors surrounding a large physical space divided into simple and tedious sub-spaces. Peasants, he ar-

gued, had houses, but lacked homes. Usually generalizing from his extensive field work in Anolaima, Valencia presented peasants' houses as having a rudimentary, if underdeveloped, architectural planning. With a certain sense of frustration, he constantly described peasants' houses as monotonous, repetitive, and boring. In peasants' houses, he observed, living rooms were simultaneously bedrooms; kitchens were often used for cultivating food or keeping animals. Even worse, he reported, there was no intimacy—children and parents usually slept in the same rooms. This promiscuity of space,

of the home, the nutrition of the family, the moral rectitude of the children, and, above all, the harmony and coordination of the different spaces of the house. In doing so, it was argued, peasant women would become truly good mothers and wives who could prepare the house for their husbands, thus contributing to the creation of a new productive nation.

Architects, therefore, were seen as those who could “save” the peasants from ignorance, ill-health and low productivity by using their professional knowledge to build homes, rather than merely houses, allowing peasants to become productive

a process through which these new, and “good” husbands, should give more independence, autonomy and opportunities to their wives in matters of how to run the home; some peasant women argued that if there was no material compensation to sustain the family, they could work outside the house to create the necessary conditions for that house to become a productive home. Thus, it was now peasant women, not men, who could bring modernity, progress and productivity to the Colombian society.

These appropriations questioned the role assigned to architects as the modernizers of the nation since, professionals such as Alberto Valencia complained, the productive (male) workers of the nation were nowhere to be seen. Valencia argued that peasant women (not men) were creating an obstacle—a “conflicted environment”—for the peasant house to become a home of a productive nation precisely because they were not following their assigned role as wives and mothers; peasants' houses were only houses where husbands and wives were fighting for economic roles and the specific benefits attached to those roles. This “conflicted environment” did not provide the tranquility and harmony necessary for the male worker to produce for the nation. But if Valencia was not able to transform these male peasants into productive workers, his job as a professional was at stake; above all, he was not complying with his putative democratic role: to move the rural peasantry away from underdevelopment and backwardness and lift them into what he considered modern, developed and productive society. In this tension, the new role assigned to professional architects such as Alberto Valencia was perpetually in the making.

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## Peasants would attach new meanings to the experiences of development and modernity—meanings perhaps not foreseen by multilateral development programs nor professionals such as Alberto Valencia.

as Valencia suggestively termed it, did not allow peasants to have homes where they could rest their bodies and cultivate their spirits—which would make them truly productive workers for the nation.

For Valencia, “proper division” of peasant houses corresponded with gender roles. He, along with many other architects and social scientists, wanted to educate male peasants on becoming good fathers, good breadwinners and, above all, good workers, not just good house owners. If a male peasant were to become a productive worker, he would need to have a specific room to sleep in (a space to recharge the necessary energy for the next day's work), an intimate room to “reproduce,” and a living room in which to spend quality time with his children and wife. Only then could peasant men be simultaneously transformed into good fathers, husbands, and productive workers.

Peasant women would prepare and properly arrange the space of the house for the needs of the productive male worker. Wives would ensure the cleanliness

workers for the nation. In particular, new gender-specific collective responsibilities were at the very center of how architects envisioned a new developed and modern society during this period.

Peasant men and women, however, would attach new meanings to the experiences of development and modernity—meanings that perhaps were foreseen neither by multilateral development programs nor professionals such as Alberto Valencia. Particularly, peasant men constantly complained that although they were very enthusiastic about being the head of the household and the workers of the nation, these new roles were not reflecting any economic benefit; indeed, if their material well-being was not met they could neither become good husbands/fathers nor true national productive workers. Peasant men reclaimed this possibility for material improvement by assuming that “their” wives and children should show respect, support and obedience as a condition for national productivity. Peasant women, however, understood these new gender assignments as





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# THINKING SPACES, URBAN PLACES

Architects are artists; architects can also be super-stars. Yet today's architects play their most important role as thinkers and doers, providing a framework for cities, just as they have done in the past. They play an important social role—whether in crime prevention, social cohesion or helping society recover from natural disasters.

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# Working in the Antipodes

## Social Housing in the Third World and High Profile Projects in the First World **BY ALEJANDRO ARAVENA**

I WAS ASKED BY *REVISTA* TO WRITE AN ARTICLE on my own work, specifically about the fact that I do simultaneous work on social housing and high-profile architectural projects, something that is, to say the least, unusual. As I was trying to explain this, everything I started to write came dangerously close to a theory or method. And that's not the way I work. On the other hand, to look at one's own way of working is something that should be avoided. So, when I remembered a letter that Hashim Sarkis, friend and Aga Khan Professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, had written to me back in 2002, I thought that could be a way to deal with the request.

Sarkis wrote to me back in 2002.

Aravena my friend:

Instead of finishing an overdue paper, my thoughts are going adrift in a manner that is becoming more frequent the more I look around me in search of coordinates. I write to you instead of thinking alone because I think you may share my impatience and help me think through some of the issues productively, but also because I believe there is a need to start a discussion among architects in search of a new synthesis.

I am growing impatient with the way architectural questions are being asked today. The current explorations are all well intentioned and they open up formal possibilities that architects can think about, but judging by the way in which discussions are going in search of a super determining force, into materials, into geometry, into programme, into form, into tectonic, there is a serious lack of synthesis. Not that we need a framework into which we can put these explorations(...). We need strate-

gies to think across these individual explorations which are very serious when they remain confined to their topic, but become thin and silly when they try to describe the whole of architectural production and relevance. The best effect that these limited revisions have is shock. A and B shock us, X and Y shock us [I have substituted the names that were originally in the letter by A, B, X and Y, not to protect innocents because they are not, but to protect Sarkis from raging architectural stars], but I do not want to think of architecture as a shock-driven discipline or of myself as someone who can only shock people in order to attract their attention. There is more to what we can do following this avalanche of explorations of the past few years.

What cuts across? What questions synthesize? I have been thinking about these questions for a while, particularly around the work I am doing in Lebanon but also around the *Practices in Democracy* sequence. At the end of every semester I use to sum up some converging themes among the revisionist practices that we would examine in class. The convergence becomes more urgent the farther away from Paris and New York the examples are. I do not know if these make up a complete set of themes but it could be a place to start a discussion:

1) How can we think of architectural questions in non-architectural terms? Meaning, from inside the domain of practice, how can we keep revising the way in which we describe things to ourselves so that we communicate the relevance of our questions to non architects but also to constantly question the validity of what seems to be fixed in our minds (...).



**Elemental Monterrey, Mexico.**

3) How can we find ways to reduce the impact of externally determined procedures on architecture and increase the capacity of every project generating a specific set of procedures that are pertinent to the questions being asked from within. Why should we always follow a set of rules written for all buildings that turn all buildings the same when we can think of every building as a source of rules that could be valid (in terms of access, materials, architectural character, etc.) (....)

5) How can we also think of architecture as a discipline and practice that is mobilized to help the disenfranchised in every project. Can building be used for redistributive purposes? This is a question that you seem to raise in your studios here at the GSD as well but which is a very difficult to ask because projects are usually built for those who have the money and when they are built for those without money it is their common interests not their individual ones that are highlighted.

I am sure that there are other important and more important questions that we can ask, but it is really along this path that I believe that we should be able to think of architecture as being at once instrumental and independent, and that we can start moving away from the singular determinisms of architecture to a more synthetic way of thinking.

Best,  
Hashim

I have been trying to translate this letter for 8 years now. Not that I don't understand it; I've been trying to transform it into facts, into built work, into a way to engage issues that matter.

The way I see it, is that architects tend to be interested in things and themes that only interest other architects. There was a path that forked in the 60s or maybe 70s.

On one path, there was a group that since the beginning of Modern Movement was asking for artistic freedom, asking







**Above: Ocean Winery, Nierstein, Germany**  
**Below: Saint Edwards University Dormitory, Austin, Texas**

society to let them be geniuses and they were given that “privilege”; the price they paid was irrelevance. This group ended up as “ists”: postmodernists, deconstructivists, minimalists, etc. and finally as stars. To dissimulate their irrelevance, they developed the strategy of shock.

On the other path, there were those wanting to deal with hard, difficult questions, but to get engaged with them, they stopped being architects and abandoned the discipline’s core: the project. This other group ended up as experts, bureaucrats, consultants for international organizations etc. and finally as non-architects. To dissimulate their impotence, they devel-

oped the strategy of diagnosis. (An expert is somebody that in a given field of knowledge can tell what not to do).

So the question, after 40 years, is:

Is it possible to engage in hard, difficult, general interest and transversal questions and contribute to them without quitting architecture, offering specific knowledge and tools to resolve non-specific problems?

I have seen recently a third group trying to make a pseudo-synthesis, making “as if” they are dealing with important issues. But this group is just pretending to do so. Instead of giving the simplest possible answers to complex questions, they are giving complicated responses to simplified problems.

This has nothing to do with moral issues, or dealing with themes that have a higher ethical standard, like poverty, or

underdevelopment, or equity. It has to do with being able to answer with what is the case, abandoning the safety of irrelevance and penetrating the risk of relevance. This is what I ruminate in silence while at work.

***Alejandro Aravena** is principal of Alejandro Aravena Architects and CEO of Elemental, a for-profit company with social interest partnering by Copelec (Chilean Oil Company) and UC (Universidad Católica de Chile). He holds the Elemental Copelec Chair at UC. He was Visiting Professor at Harvard GSD from 2000-2005, won the Silver Lion at the 2008 Venice Biennale and is member of the Pritzker Prize Jury. This year, he became an International Fellow of the RIBA, the Royal Institute of British Architects.*

# Designing Urban Opportunities

Games and Integration **BY FLAVIO JANCHES**

**IMAGINE A GAGGLE OF EIGHT-YEAR-OLDS CHAS-**ing each other on a playground they helped designed themselves. Imagine an enthusiastic team of teenagers trying to kick a ball just like their soccer star hero Diego Armando Maradona. Imagine a colorful mural filled with flowers and angels.

As you, the visitor to a Buenos Aires *villa de emergencia*, approach, you see this is no ordinary mural. The mural, between depictions of angels and flowers, displays publicly the names of those youth who for all these years were only remembered in the grief of family

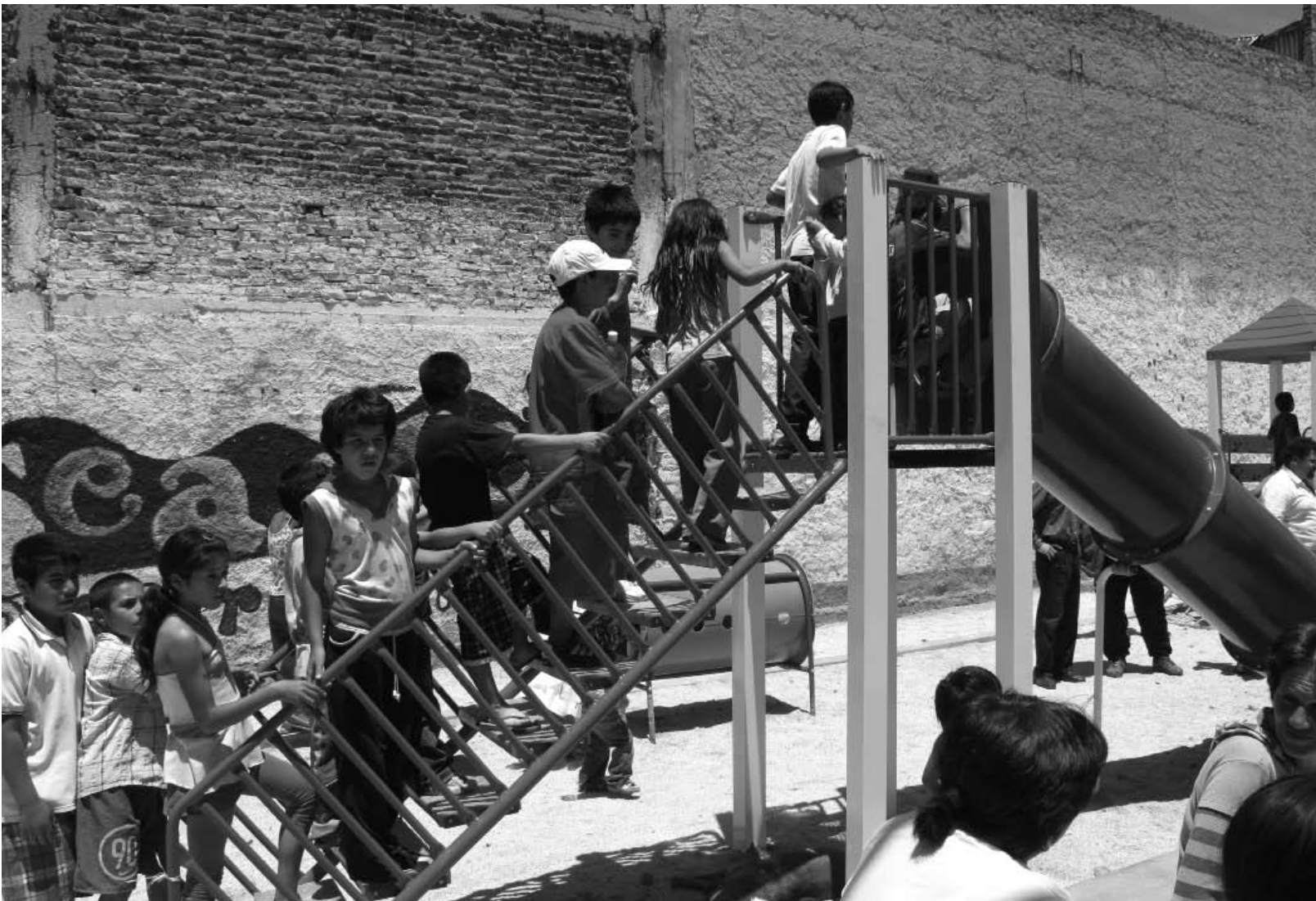
intimacy. Families of the victims participated by bringing in their memories and stories. Today, the space is being transformed into a place for sports and leisure activities. However, the identification of the space as a public area that belongs to the community was defined before the first brick was laid.

Discovering the slums of Buenos Aires—known by the poetic name of *villas de emergencia* (emergency dwellings)—is to experience a space where the city constructs itself on a daily basis. Here, one is most likely to observe need and economic incapacity. Soon, however, the visitor

finds another type of experience: villas de emergencia are places where generations of residents have consolidated a defined communitarian structure in the daily life of the neighborhood.

To capitalize on that already-existing sense of community, we have been developing this capacity of “games” in the villas where we are working in Buenos Aires. Many different types of events are programmed to define where and how to construct this new network of activi-

**Children explore a playground that they helped design themselves.**







**Recreational activities provide different ways of re-utilizing urban space.**



ties. Youth participate in this decision-making through their written opinions, as well as through drawings and photographs. They have a voice in deciding what should be constructed and where. This process of early involvement is important because it attracted the attention of adults who would directly or indirectly become part of the transformation.

One of the first activities was painting a mural in one of the most difficult neighborhoods. Both poverty and daily violence made the neighborhood particularly challenging, but the project managed to involve youth with records of violence; muralists led by artists and social workers consolidated a working group. The subject matter developed by them set out to show the violence of the neighborhood by honoring the memory of those who

had lost their lives to violence.

Many of these cultural happenings help construct a space of daily coexistence, putting into place not only physical and social improvement of the urban area, but creating the integrative capacity of making the villas part of the city. It is precisely their own culture that identifies them as community, where the possibility exists of transforming these discriminatory processes.

Many institutions are trying to consolidate spaces where residents can define their own identity. These range from various religious institutions to sports facilities where soccer provides a place to get together, as well as a symbol of progress.

Soccer star Diego Armando Maradona is the most prominent symbol since

he overcame his humble upbringing to achieve international recognition. To *villeros*, he is a hero and an example to follow. However, he is far from the only villa resident who has used sports to break the barriers of poverty; many soccer idols have been able to rescue relatives from poverty through their participation in the great national sport of soccer.

But the sport also permits villa residents to participate in regional tournaments, broadening their world, as well as to engage in spontaneous competition in their own neighborhoods.

“Games” of all sorts, that is, recreational activities, are spaces that permit integration, according to their scale, spaces and communities, because they propose different ways of re-utilizing urban space in the context of tacit or predefined agreements of social co-existence.

It's not just in Argentina. A good example of how games and the involvement of youth led to the recuperation of socially disarticulated urban space can be found in the projects of Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck, who constructed 700 playgrounds in Amsterdam after World War II. Through these play spaces, he helped repair a morally and socially devastated city, through its youngest citi-



zens. The youth were the motor of the process of physical and social recuperation, returning to the city its status as a community.

In Buenos Aires, these *villas de emergencia* continue to be hidden away and not integrated into the city as a whole. In part, that's because of structural poverty, but it is also because most non-dwellers are afraid to venture into the villas because they see them as dangerous places.

Villas, precisely because they are precarious and illegal settlements with high crime rates, represent a strange and terrifying urban space for the residents of the "formal" city. Thus, villa residents suffer a stigma that goes beyond their condition of poverty. It is not only economic distance that separates them from the rest of society, but the suspicion of criminality.

"Villeros," as villa residents are called, are seen from the outside in a derogatory fashion. Nevertheless, their status as "villeros" is resignified within the villa itself and adopted as a badge of communitarian identity. Survival techniques adopted by villa residents range from the symbolic and cultural appropriation of a "villero" identity to the imprint of this identity on cultural products and communitarian institutions. Games that involve community participation, along with neighborhood involvement in the design of community leisure space, bring youth into the life of the community and the community into the life of the city.

This experience shows us a possible path, obviously not the only one, but a way to a flexible system, suitable for consolidation through games. Through youth and youth activities, it is possible to find a model of urban integration in areas and societies that are struggling to be recognized as part of the city.

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# Diadema, SP, Brazil

## Housing, Urban Design and Citizenship

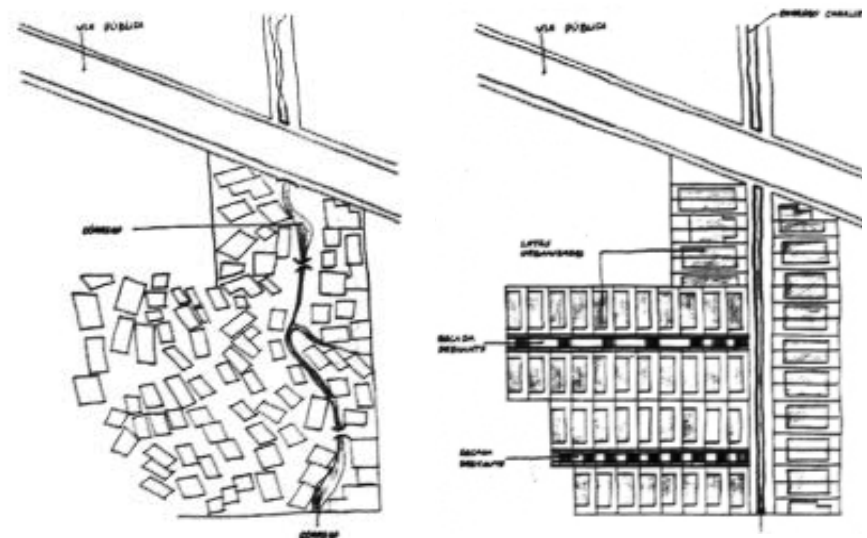
BY JOSÉ DE FILIPPI

PRESTIGIOUS BRITISH MAGAZINE *THE ECONOMIST* RECENTLY FEATURED BRAZILIAN BUSINESS and finance in a 14-page special report. Under the headline "Brazil takes off," an article entitled "A better today" cited the city of Diadema as a good example of what Brazil might become in the near future: "If the next ten years see as much social and economic progress as the past ten, Brazil will become a very different place. A good place to see how this might work is Diadema, a formerly rough neighborhood of São Paulo. In 1999 the murder rate there reached 141 per 100,000 people (...) but since then the murder rate has dropped steeply. Earlier this year (...) a six-story shopping mall opened in Diadema. (...) It is a fine place to eat a "pão de queijo" (cheese bread) and reflect on what this spot was like only a short decade ago" (p. 17, *The Economist*, November 2009).

As mayor of Diadema at the beginning of this decade, I faced a startling high homicide rate, a serious threat for the city's future. A wide, creative, effective and participatory public security policy reduced the homicide rate from 140 to 20 per 100,000 people in eight years, from 1999 to 2006. In 2007 and 2008 the rate remained nearly the same. In 2009, there was again good news; from January to November the annual rate was 14.3 homicide per 100,000, tremendous progress.

I could write and discuss the achievements, problems and challenges in public security policy in Diadema here. It would be exciting. Nevertheless, I would like to focus on Diadema's housing and urban design improvements that have contributed, I am sure, to a very significant reduction in urban violence.

In 1983, when Gilson Menezes, Brazil's first Workers Party (PT) mayor, took office in Diadema, three out of every ten city dwellers lived in slums ("favelas"). At that time, Diadema had 200,000 residents (now, 400,000). Nearly everything



Above, left: Registry of existing shacks

Right: Project of lots, access system to lots and internal circulation within the nucleus



**Above left to right: Marilene favela before; Marilene reurbanized core after; opposite page, Sanko affordable housing, a partnership between municipality and social movements; federally-funded Serra Dourada.**

had to be done: 80 percent of the streets needed to be paved and an absolutely precarious health and education system badly needed to be fixed.

In Diadema today, only three out of every hundred dwellers live in favelas. I certainly expect that in the next four or five years, the city might commemorate a landmark: Diadema 2013 or 2014, a city without slums!

Reducing favelas from 30 percent to 3 percent in 25 years is indeed a great achievement. I'll now try to tell you how this all came about.

#### 1983-1990: THE FIRST 8 YEARS

Instead of using the frequent urban design term "slum upgrading," I prefer the expression "slum reurbanization" and to transform slums in a reurbanized core. As Austrian-born U.S. architect Bernard Rudofsky would say, the slums are urbanism without urbanists. In the early 80s, with very little money for housing policies, we managed to bring together people from the favelas with technical support from City Hall to tackle the problem.

We can describe the first steps:

- 1) Creation of a City Hall special office team for the reurbanization of favelas

- 2) Motivation of communitarian organization in favelas through dwellers' committees
- 3) Risk assessment
- 4) Redistricting and relocation of families
- 5) Water and electricity supply
- 6) Sewage collection, stairs and street lights
- 7) Security of land tenure, 90-year concessions.

#### AFTER THE FIRST STEPS

In the beginning it was very hard. Counting on very little money—from one to two percent of the municipal budget – the City Hall technical and political team started reurbanizing the first slums. Following the steps mentioned above, the first slums to be tackled were those where families did not have to be moved, since we had no financial support to relocate them.

The subsequent relocation of families to permanent lots occurred gradually, based always on solidarity and cooperation among residents. The dweller committees contributed much to the accomplishment of such a hard task – almost all the houses had to be relocated and rebuilt.

Worthy of mention during this period is a municipal land tenure act (Law 819/1985) for those who lived in slums on municipal property. This pioneering initiative, the first of its type in the entire country, served as a means of guarantee-

ing that dwellers could make home improvements.

After four years of work, only a small number of slums had been reurbanized or were due to begin the process of reurbanization. However, despite some discouraging moments, the process continued.

Once the work is finished, the former slum receives the new name "reurbanized housing nucleus," and is referred to by that name, even by those who live there. To achieve this status, the area must pass through a process of transforming actions: guarantee of land tenure, with land concessions; infrastructure of public services carried out by the municipality; dweller commitment to building their own houses with technical support and orientation by the municipal housing office.

After all that, the dweller of the former slum, now a reurbanized nucleus, becomes a citizen and owner of a very important distinguishing sign: an address in his city, making it possible for him or her to have access to various urban services for the first time.

#### 1991-1996

During this period, the process became stronger and more productive.

Now more experienced, all the actors, committees and technical support teams could enjoy the advantages of greater financial resources. Thus, the municipal housing policy in Diadema began to



carry out the necessary strategic actions to form what would become a real housing policy – a policy through which the reurbanization of slums remained an important action, but never without developing a context to prevent the growth of new subnormal housing settlements.

During this period, there were important initiatives: the creation of the Municipal Fund for Social Interest Housing (Fumapis) in September 1991; the first housing meeting, which brought together dozens of dwellers' committees and housing movement representatives; the Municipal Council approval of the City Master Plan, which emphasized the creation of Social Interest Special Areas (AEIS) including slums and open areas. Those areas would be reserved for Housing Social Interest Projects. More than 220 acres were designated as AEIS in Diadema in 1994.

At that time, municipal housing policy emphasized following actions:

- Reurbanization of “favelas”
- Municipal land purchases to relocate slum dwellers
- Areas purchased by dwellers' associations (AEIS)
- New construction projects by state and federal governments.
- Partnership between municipality and social movements for joint projects
- Private investments still in small scale.

1997-2000

That four-year period was the only one in

25 years when the City of Diadema was not governed by PT. It was then that, unfortunately, the Housing Secretariat was closed down and its tasks placed under the jurisdiction of the Public Works Office. It was not by chance that five new big slums rose up in the city at the time.

2001-2008

When PT returned to office, the former policy was put in practice once again. The Housing Secretariat was also restructured. During this period, both the state and federal governments were investing in new social housing units—an important and long-pursued priority for the Diadema municipality.

#### LATIN AMERICA'S CHALLENGE

As a Loeb fellow at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, I have been doing a lot of interesting reading. New York writer Jane Jacobs' book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, made a particular impression on me.

I took away some interesting thoughts and questions from her opus:

“Why do some slums stay slums and other slums regenerate themselves even against financial and official opposition?”

“Cities are an immense laboratory of trial and error.”

“The simple needs of automobiles are more easily understood and satisfied than the complex needs of cities...”

Jane Jacobs came to Boston in 1939

and kept in touch with the North End (a well-known Boston neighborhood). When she returned 20 years later in 1959, she wrote:

“When I saw the North End again in 1959, I was amazed at the change”...(in what was) “considered Boston's worst slum and civic shame.” “Dozens and dozens of building had been rehabilitated,” she observed. “The streets were alive with children playing, people shopping, people strolling, people talking.”

Jacobs declared that she “will be writing about how cities work in real life and then try to learn what principles of planning and what practices in rebuilding can promote social and economic vitality.”

We Latin American dwellers in our own metropoli face this enormous challenge: to provide a better life for millions who also have been arriving in our cities. The reality of Latin America is that poor people have already moved to our cities and settled there. We certainly need new housing and new infrastructure investment, but we should never forget considering what poor people have done their own way, with their own wisdom, to the urbanization of our cities. In many cases this is a good starting point!

*Jose de Filippi is a 2009/2010 Loeb fellow at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. He is a civil engineer and he was, for three terms, mayor of Diadema.*





# Mexico City, Again

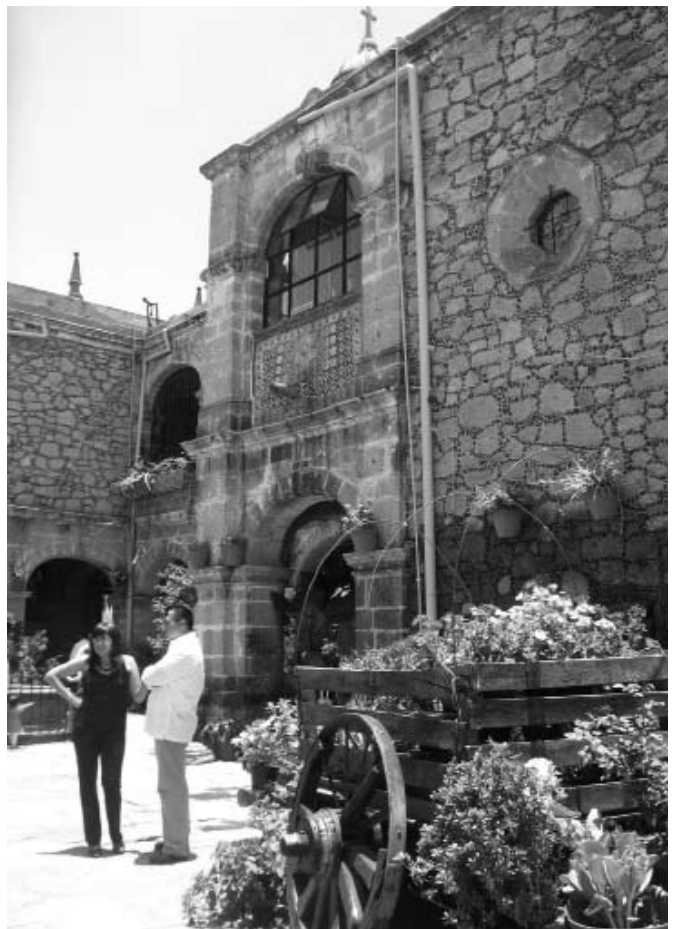
## A Photoessay

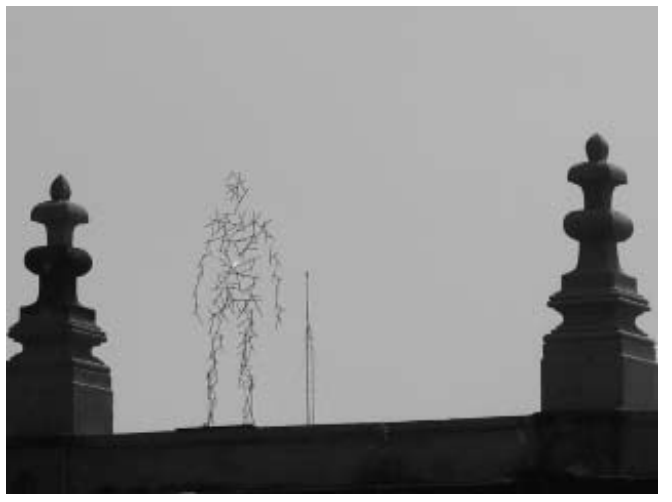
BY ROSARIO INÉS GRANADOS SALINAS

**AFTER SEVEN YEARS OF GRADUATE SCHOOL, FIRST IN LONDON AND THEN at Harvard, I finally came back to Mexico City, my hometown. During the summer months, with the generous support of a DRCLAS summer grant, I was doing research toward my dissertation on the history of Our Lady of Remedios, a cult image considered patroness of the Spanish conquest over the Mexico. I was also been able to spend a good deal of time taking pictures of this amazing, yet crazy metropolis.**

This has been a new experience, because instead of merely walking the streets, I have been forced to think what the city means to me. Thus, for this photographic project, I decided to show a crowded city where art is all over the place, where the big—and shameful—contrast between poverty and richness is impossible to miss, where some peaceful sites are still available ... a modern city that breathes its past within. I made pictures mainly of architecture to show how people interact with it, but also paid attention to some aspects of urban infrastructure. I did make portraits of favorite places and sites that have been forgotten, the archive where I do my research, and some of many churches that show the passing of time. More than a full registry of Mexico City, this is the gaze over my reunion with it.

*Rosario Inés Granados Salinas is a PhD candidate in Harvard's Department of History of Art and Architecture.*





# On Conflict Resolution

Quality Design Matters **BY OSCAR GRAUER**

THROUGHOUT LATIN AMERICA, DIVISIONS AND conflicts in the first decade of the 21st century have separated countries, communities, friends and family members, adding to the polarization and confrontation among informal settlers, informal and formal residents, and among formal dwellers. Cities are being pulled apart by gated communities. Houses are fenced and/or walled, and/or protected with bars on their doors and windows, both in formal and informal settlements.

A polarized world between the haves and the have-nots has increased violence and crime fueled by resentment. Some of the most important problems worldwide are crime, citizens' safety and corruption, as *Foreign Policy* editor Moisés Naím observed in a November 11, 2009, article in Spanish daily *El País*. In Latin America with its rampant pseudo-populism and vast differences in educational and economic levels, most cities epitomize tensions expressed in spatial and social order, as most notably documented in the Urban Age Project by the London School of Economics and Deutsche Bank's Alfred Herrhausen Society (*The Endless City*, Phaidon Press Ltd., London, 2007, p.11).

In order to minimize conflicts and violence, and bring down fences and walls of separation and misunderstanding, quality design matters. In terms of medium and long-term goals, quality design helps shape educational, health, and socioeconomic programs. In the short run, much can be done in the urban scenarios: quality urban planning and design affecting the public realm, as well as good architectural solutions particularly in housing and services. These aspects can play a key role in diminishing physical barriers, thus contributing to a reduction of tension and discrimination. Radical change can be accomplished through a com-

mitment to carry it out with a clear and transparent plan and strategies to reach goals in a timely manner.

What does quality design means in cities of developing countries? Let's start by saying that what is good for the more fortunate is also good for the less privileged. We will elaborate on this issue.

## A GLIMPSE AT TRENDS IN LATIN AMERICAN CITIES

Violence is mostly manifested in urban areas for obvious reasons: half of the population already is living in cities, and three out of every four people will be living in cities in 2050. In Asia, Africa and Latin America almost a billion people—one sixth of the world population and one third of urban dwellers—live in informal settlements. By 2020, an estimated 1.4 billion people will be living in slums and two billion by 2030. In many cities the population living in informal settlements is larger than those living in formal areas: one third in São Paulo, one fifth in Rio de Janeiro, two thirds in Mexico City and over a half in Caracas, according to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements*. UN-Habitat, 2003.

In Venezuela, for instance, between 1999 and 2008 there were 101,141 violent deaths. That translates into 28 people per day. Official Caracas police figures show that there were 4,160 murders in 2006—130 for every 100,000 residents, the latest year for which statistics were available. What this means is that urban violence is almost three times higher than the national average. This figure is more than twice as many as Cape Town, South Africa, which is the next most violent city with 62 murders per 100,000 inhabitants (South Africa, *The Good News*, "Violent crime rates down, but still high,"

July 2, 2008. Declarations by Safety and Security Minister Charles Nqakula).

Fortunately, violent crime has decreased considerably in a few cities in Latin America. For instance, in 2001 Medellín in Colombia was considered the most violent city in the world. In 2007 the homicide rate went down to 34.5 out of every 100,000 people (654 homicides total), one of the lowest in the region. The homicide rate went up 33% in 2008, bringing the figure to 871 (*Indicadores de derechos humanos y DIH Colombia. 2008 Programa Presidencial de Derechos Humanos y Derecho Internacional Humanitario*, p.58. Observatorio del Programa Presidencial de Derechos Humanos y DIH Vicepresidencia de la República, Colombia).

Bogotá has followed a similar trend, although it has managed to keep the homicide rate from rebounding. The common denominator in these two cities has been the transformation of the city fabric by the introduction of quality design components citywide as part of a comprehensive program. Many cities worldwide, without such crime rates, have carried out urban revitalization programs, always using the public space as the main component for the introduction of changes: Lyon in France, London in Great Britain, Providence in the United States, Buenos Aires in Argentina, to name a few examples.

In the case of Medellín, it took citizens with the leadership of the Mayor's Office only four years to turn the city around. "Medellín, the most educated city" program included: (i) new urban projects under social management to coordinate different institutions and community participation—both new public spaces and buildings were to promote social interaction; (ii) a program solely oriented to the construction of new educational





facilities and the rehabilitation of existing ones; (iii) Integrated Urban Projects (PUI) to provide, within specific areas, connections, transportation (including the use of cable-car gondolas to reach barrios on hillsides), open space, and other city components within informal settlements to minimize crime and violence; (iv) social housing for low-income people; (v) a plan of *paseos*, emblematic avenues and linear parks to weave the city together favoring transportation and spaces and building for cultural development ( <http://www.medellin.gov.co>).

Clearly, there is a direct correlation between quality urban spaces and decline of crime. And availability of quality city spaces means accessibility for a quality urban arena with a high degree of social interaction. However, Medellín is a city of 3.5 million inhabitants, Bogotá of about 7.0 million people, with roughly 40 percent of them living in informal settlements. This is an insignificant number when compared with the task ahead of 1.4 billion in 2020 or two billion in 2030.

## RECONCEPTUALIZING THE PUBLIC REALM

There is a need to reconceptualize what a public space should be in these particular circumstances. Clearly, it is essential to provide accessibility, community services, infrastructure (water, sewage, drainage, electricity, and garbage collection, public illumination, and open spaces, educational, recreational, medical, and sport facilities) in a timely, sustainable and financially sound manner in the so-called informal settlements. But, all these interventions must provide for connectivity to and from the formal settlements, so social interaction between different social groups (currently not very welcome) can occur.

Quality design means public spaces or structures that would invite non-residents to penetrate other neighborhoods that facilitate exposure to different parts of the city, bringing accessibility to metropolitan uses spread around the city. Cultural, sport, and medical facilities with distinctive characters should be found in all urban areas, thus breaking

## Parque Biblioteca España in Medellín, Colombia.

stigmas and bridging divisions.

Some people will need to be displaced to make room for these new facilities. However, disruption should be minimized by agglomerating as many infrastructure services along with transportation (accessibility) since the introduction of accessibility is also an easement not only for supplying these services but for its maintenance.

The scale and pace required for providing solutions is a real issue that we need to address right away. How do we capture externalities related to the provision of accessibility? Furthermore, including infrastructure services (water supply and waste-water systems, garbage collection, electricity and gas) along with quality open space can minimize temporary disruptions and speed up the process. For instance, we should consider three-dimensional structures that could accommodate all the necessary infra-



**Colegio Kennedy in Patio Bonito, Bogotá, Colombia; bottom: informal settlement public space Improvements include the cable car system in Medellín, Colombia.**

structure and accessibility needs for an informal settlement. This type of structure would touch special places where connectivity within informal and formal settlements can provide for leisure open spaces that will lead to facilities and other means of transportation. Furthermore, swapping formal facilities into informal settlements and vice versa can encourage social integration. These should be complementary but they should never be duplicated at either end. Leading people from one end to the other is a goal for reducing social friction and integrating different members of the society in conflict.

We are now entering the second decade of the 21st century. Concerns about global issues have promoted research on sustainability and low emission energy sources, on preservation and recycling,

and on more efficient and nature-conscious processes using available resources. What has been labeled as trash for decades now is a means to produce energy. In general, the perception of cities is shifting from a polluting and waste-generating place to a wealth-producing conglomerate of alternative sources of energy, of products for agricultural purposes, and other “green” ends, when seen as one component of a larger hinterland (the ecological footprint of a city within its region), as Venezuelan environmental consultant Arnoldo J. Gabaldón writes in *Desarrollo sustentable, la salida de América Latina* (Grijalbo, 2006, pp. 379, 392). Transportable photovoltaic cells located on-site can soon replace the need for wiring a city for electricity. Processes for recycling local rain- and used water, conveniently located within open spaces of the urban fabric, will soon be a simple, financially accessible solution for many. Local community participation in the construction and maintenance of

these new infrastructure facilities will be both a byproduct and a requirement. The more the sense of community, the less the room for violence and confrontation. Virtual three-dimensional representation can provide for testing, community participation, and solving problems before quality design construction starts. Hopefully, we will be witnessing in the near future technological advancements that can help us come up with less expensive, more sustainable, and faster solutions for dealing with qualitative and quantitative urban matters.

#### THE POLITICAL DIMENSION

This type of interventions would require political will, community support, and a great deal of negotiation due to the conflicting and almost irreconcilable positions among the actors. Therefore, strong legal support and forceful stances would need to be set in place. Involving the private sector, community representatives, public leadership, and a clear and consistent and transparent informational program are required.

In theory, everyone wants a more secure and livable city. However, the means to accomplish that goal are not politically favorable in the short term. No one on either side of the social spectrum would favor integration in the name of security when each side has been doing everything possible to isolate themselves from others; there is also the issue of a loss of privileges and habits in order to accommodate new public spaces/connectors. For instance, in Bogotá, sidewalks (municipally owned) and front setbacks of buildings (privately owned) had traditionally been taken over to park cars. The Mayor’s office decided to recuperate ownership and give public space back to pedestrians by rebuilding all sidewalks with double the height, so cars could not climb up. A citywide protest almost stopped the program. However, after pedestrians started to enjoy walking their city and traffic improved, private owners started integrating their front setbacks to the sidewalks. In a matter of months the city transformed from car-oriented to a

pedestrian-friendly mode. Wider sidewalks, new uses in building at street level, open cafes and restaurants soon changed the way people experienced the city.

#### THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSION

Integration in the urban realm requires interventions both in the informal and formal areas. Certainly, the formal city enjoys a greater deal of services, infrastructure and amenities. Most cities in the developing world have experienced rapid growth, creating a great space for improvement by incorporating new urban components favoring the public realm. Therefore, solving urban problems in cities with such degree of conflicts demands interventions in both formal and informal settlements since, in most cases, physical and psychological barriers constructed over decades do not provide for connectivity. Not only in the in-between spaces but well inside both worlds there is space for intervention and, therefore, social interaction.

Good design will not necessarily do away with all radical and intolerant positions. However, it will go a long way toward resolving conflicts. Good design matters.

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# On Haiti

## Rebuilding Social and Urban Fabric **BY OSCAR GRAUER**

#### EMERGENCY AND PLANNING BECOME ONE WORD.

While dealing with emergency in Haiti, planning for the future must take place simultaneously.

Taking care of survivors, providing them with food, water, medicine and basic shelter, while patrolling to avoid looting and real risks of epidemic breakouts are huge necessities. But so is thinking about reconstruction and its architectural shape.

To think and to act become one single verb.

To accomplish such a degree of coordination, an ad-hoc technical and managerial team should be appointed to lead the planning process. Due to the lack of professional resources, aggravated by the emergency, foreign specialists with knowledge of similar contexts and situations must join efforts with the available local personnel.

There is no room for traditional planning.

I'm not making vague ivory-tower suggestions here. Like Haiti, Venezuela, my country, suffered a devastating natural disaster in 1999. I was heading a rehabilitation team for Venezuela's coastal littoral, after dramatic floods ripped up houses and literally reshaped the coastline and beaches. What I applied to the experience then was the importance of incorporating decisions that influence the long-term development of the area affected by the disaster with decisions that alleviate immediate tragedy.

Haiti's reconstruction process should start right away. The on-site decision-making team should exhaust urban planning and design strategies. Decisions should be made on a daily, sometimes hourly, basis, drawing from a flow of information from specialists and common citizens alike, working in an orchestrated manner.

This highly experienced and motivated team of people from many different disciplines—from planning, design and infrastructure to geology and seismology to sociology, law, communication and finance—should also provide technical guidance. Short-term responses should be orchestrated to shape the future. Uncoordinated actions, without a comprehensive vision, lead to inefficient results and long-term problems. The team should be able to ask the right questions and to get immediate answers.

When tragedies strike, it is within human nature to respond immediately and try to help any way possible, even risking our own lives. Capturing the momentum of this good will will be crucial for the reconstruction of Haiti. Capitalizing on financial and human resources and putting them to work effectively require an organization able to envision goals and to invest these resources efficiently. Corruption is also a critical factor to be aware of. It may distort the outcomes of the proposals and deviate funds badly required for the rehabilitation process.

The participation of academia, grass root movements and institutions perceived by the community to be trustworthy offer a neutral framework to deal with complex technical, managerial, and political situations, in which so many actors and interests are at play.

In such a poor and devastated environment, some key decisions have to be made: locating and designing temporary shelters, which tend to become permanent; connecting new with recoverable existing infrastructure to rehabilitate the existing urban fabric or creating new urban form when more appropriate; reconstructing iconic spaces and buildings to preserve urban memory; reactivating the real-estate market by recognizing preexisting property values; taking advantage of local technologies



and introducing new ones to better cope with future similar events; and considering alternative solutions that result in multiplying job opportunities, reactivation of the economy and other means of sustainable growth. If all these decisions point in the same direction, they will facilitate the conditions to rebuild the social fabric.

Community participation is a crucial component for the rehabilitation of existing districts and/or to determine their (re)location. Communities, in general, tend to be quite resilient and can devote much energy and labor towards reconstruction, with the proper guidance. Rebuilding social fabric means preserving and enhancing social ties and relations, a difficult task in Haiti where thousands of lives were lost.

Catastrophic events like the Christmas Day earthquake are special opportunities to introduce new technical, managerial, legal and social paradigms. It is crucial to preserve the collective memory, as well as to tap special resources of multi-lateral organizations and donations. Adequate expertise, coordination, and transparency are necessary to guarantee effectiveness. The particular severity of the Haitian drama requires creative and non-conventional solutions. It is a unique opportunity to reshape Haiti's future.

**Oscar Grauer** holds two degrees from Harvard University, and was 2001 Cisneros Visiting Scholar at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies. He directed the team appointed by the Venezuelan Government to manage the recovery efforts after the disastrous 1999 floodings in the Litoral Central de Venezuela.

*For ways some architects are thinking about post-earthquake Haiti, see <http://architectureforhumanity.org/updates/2010-01-13-haiti-quake-appeal-long-term-reconstruction>.*



## Three Tall Buildings

Viewing Rogelio Salmona **BY JUNE CAROLYN ERLICK**

**I USED TO HATE THE THREE TALL TOWERS THAT thrust against the verdant mountains.**

I used to think that the red brick towers dug into the landscape, belonging to some other city and some other space, created a scar of modernity.

That was thirty years ago. I don't think my taste in architecture has changed that much, but my relationship to the Torres del Parque certainly has.

For one thing, I can now see the towers from my wide windows across the Parque de Independencia. They do not invade the green view; they blend with it. Perhaps the brick has faded over the years, or more likely the fact is that Bogotá is now a city of apartment buildings. My friends grew up in houses; their children are being raised in elevator buildings with doormen.

The few times that I went to the Torres in the mid-70s and 80s, I approached the buildings in taxi, riding up in the elevator to play Scrabble with a friend. The view in his apartment was of the bullring, and had me thinking that the towers weren't all that bad from inside. Yet I still disliked them.

Now I live in a historical 1962 building called the Embajador right on the Séptima and gaze up at the towers. Lots of friends live there; the avenue up from the Torres has become a gastronomic paradise, with Mexican, Arab, Cuban, *costeño*, and even a gringo restaurant called the Hamburguesería; my dry cleaners is in the Torres complex, and so is a fragrant bakery with excellent *tinto*—the Colombian equivalent of espresso. A coffeehouse-bookstore is right across the street, and so is a video

**Left: Torres del Parque; right top to bottom: Virgilio Barco Public Library, Bogotá (1999-2001); National General Archives, Bogotá (1988-1992); National General Archives, Bogotá (1988-1992)**

place that rents art films. Needless to say, I walk frequently up through the Parque de Independencia and wend my way through the Torres to this Bogotá version of Greenwich Village.

The steep red brick steps still manage to take the wind out of me. But I often encounter friends with their babies and acquaintances with dogs. I see students and children and old people that seem to have an easier time with the steps than I do, and sometimes I don't see anyone I know, but lots of people with a vaguely intellectual air that look as if I should know them.

When I look out of my window, I also see the Museum of Modern Art, a squat red brick building that is at once friendly and ugly. After arriving in August, I soon learned Rogelio Salmona was the architect of both the museum and the towers. I should have guessed that because of his signature use of red brick, but then again Bogotá is filled with red brick. So when the museum hosted an exhibit of Salmona's work, I went in spite of my fairly low expectations: probably lots of photos and architectural mockups.

Children and their parents were ducking under some huge Japanese-like lampshades. Each revolving lampshade bore the name of a Salmona project. I held my breath and ducked. I found myself inside a familiar landscape, the steps leading up to the towers, a space with dogs and kids and folks with shopping bags, a community space. It was no accident that I had hated the towers before, and now enjoyed them as a social space. Salmona hadn't conceived them just to be glimpsed from a distance, but to be experienced.

The Salmona exhibit was the most interactive I've seen in Colombia. Children sprawled on the floor, drawing copies of the building. A teenager was reading an



essay on architecture to a group of classmates. Museum-goers watched Salmona explain his architecture on a flat digital television screen, and films flashed overhead. There were indeed the photos and the architectural mockups I had expected, but the explanations gave them context.

I paused in front of one explanatory sign: “Rogelio Salmona’s innovative proposals seek to construct a more democratic city, providing public spaces for living together that gives incentives to sociability, mutual recognition and social organization.”

Salmona’s work, influenced by French architect Le Corbusier, was a response to the migration to Bogotá in the 1950s, I learned from one of the signs. His buildings—many of them so-called social housing—sought to confront marginality, unemployment and housing shortages. His buildings, whether public or private, for the rich or the poor, were surrounded by trees and parks and walkways. Written explanations informed me that some of the parks designed for social housing were never built. None of the signs explained what I remember from Colombian history: heavy migration to Bogotá was caused by people fleeing from La Violencia, the bloody war between liberals and conservatives that wracked Colombia’s countryside. At home, I’m reading a book of journalistic reminiscences by Carlos Villar Borda. Just last night, I was reading his description of the *cortes*, the intricate machete slashes used by one political band against the other, about the way fetuses were carved out of mother’s wombs and replaced with the head of a cow.

This is what the rural population was fleeing, and this is the city that Salmona wanted to construct to combat those memories. And here I stumble on another sign: “The architecturally-designed building is a place of encounter, to love and to rest, to discover and to experience the passing of time.”

I had come to the exhibit to learn a bit more about my neighboring buildings. I had come to the exhibit perhaps to take a break from thinking about journalism and journalism education and elections and wars and nightmares. And even though the word “violence” was never once mentioned in the exhibit, what I had found was an antidote to violence, the creation of public space and a communal identity.

The kids were still sprawled on the floor, drawing buildings and coloring them, as I left the museum. I glanced up. There were the towers, strong and stable against the glowing mountains.

I love the three tall towers.

**June Carolyn Erlick** is the editor-in-chief of ReVista, the Harvard Review of Latin America. This chapter is reprinted from *A Gringa in Bogotá: Living Colombia’s Invisible War* by June Carolyn Erlick, Copyright © 2010. Courtesy of the University of Texas Press. Erlick is also the author of *Disappeared, A Journalist Silenced* (Seal Press, 2004).

# Fables of Reconstruction

## Chaitén, After the Volcano

BY PABLO ALLARD

ON MAY 3, 2008, THE 5,000 VILLAGERS IN THE SMALL BUT THRIVING TOWN of Chaitén, Chile, were awakened by the fierce eruption of the volcano of the same name just three miles to the north, neglected by geologists and dormant for more than 250 years. They faced double danger: fluidized masses of rock fragments and gases (known as pyroclastic flows) could engulf the town or the volcano’s dome could collapse. The authorities decided to evacuate more than 7,000 people from the town and surrounding area in less than 48 hours. Despite the difficulties accessing the disaster zone, there were no fatalities.

During the early days of eruption, the column of incandescent ashes reached more than 7.5 miles high. It covered the town and its surrounding hills with almost two feet of ash. The disaster, though, was not caused directly by the volcano, but by the river Blanco. Heavy rain swept away most of the ash out after a few days, clogging the river and forcing it to find a way through the city. Chaitén, the capital of Palena Province, was a hub of services and connectivity for the isolated communities of the Chilean Patagonia. The floods destroyed most of the town’s infrastructure, including the regional airfield; operations in the port were severely limited. More than two-thirds of all property were leveled.

The Chilean government responded rapidly, putting the Minister of Defense in charge of coordinating crisis management. A special authority, the Presidential Delegate on Chaitén took over from the Minister of Defense in June. The delegate had a mandate to help displaced families with temporary accommodation, providing each family a displacement bond worth about \$1,000. The temporary loss of Chaitén meant that a complete region, including many small communities, would have to depend on Argentina to maintain communications and connectivity and access to hospitals and services, literally splitting Chile in two and posing a complex geopolitical dilemma.

The volcanic eruption continued and it became clear it would last longer than expected. By late July, the river had destroyed most of town. Small groups of Chaiteninos were allowed to return to town simply to recover whatever was left. A few decided to stay, defying both the volcano and the government’s call for complete evacuation. Despite its well-orchestrated evacuation and support for displaced persons, the government made no plans for reconstruction or relocation, since most of the Chaitén urban area was still subject to a high volcanic risk. In turn,





**Aerial view of the town of Chaitén and the neighboring volcano**

the Cities Observatory (OCUC)—an urban and territorial intelligence unit at the Catholic University in Santiago—offered regional and national authorities its services for the creation of a special task force of more than 30 professionals to rapidly analyze strategic scenarios and make recommendations for reconstruction or relocation of the town.

#### TURNING A CATASTROPHE INTO AN OPPORTUNITY

The eventual reconstruction or relocation of Chaitén posed a great challenge. But it is also an opportunity for Chile to develop a new response policy for natural disasters, which occur frequently here. Instead of treating the short-term emergency response as a cost, the idea was to consider the process of planning as an investment. Mid- and long-term scenarios were considered while responding to disaster relief. The idea of simultaneous vision was key—especially considering that Patagonia is one of the most sensitive and isolated areas in Chile and a world biosphere reserve.

Chaitén's geopolitical importance within Chilean Patagonia, and the beauty of its natural features allow for the development of an eco-tourism industry, conservation, high-quality end-user services and sustainable production. These will be defining factors in the future of Chaitén and the region as a whole. Uncertainty over the future of the still-erupting volcano provided a window of opportunity to define an adequate strategy, aligned with a clear development vision. The Chilean government defined four key issues as priorities for the future development of

the country: territorial equality, sustainability, innovation and country branding.

This new vision could materialize as a sustainable, low-impact development prioritizing efficient use of economic and natural resources. The Palena region could reduce its current dependence on Chile's mainland for the majority of its services and provisions.

The small size of Chaitén allows for innovation in terms of sustainable urban planning and design. A town of 5,000 people has the right scale and components for self-sufficiency and low dependency on external sources for services such as energy, water, waste management and goods. New tools, capabilities and policies utilized in rebuilding Chaitén could serve as a model for contemporary, sustainable approaches to planning small, remote towns in developing countries.

By the time the Cities Observatory (OCUC) set up the task force, preliminary information showed that the level of destruction was so high that any potential scenario meant starting from zero in terms of urbanization, infrastructure, energy provision and services. This situation enabled thinking to focus on a settlement for the future. The potential for exploring new infrastructure paradigms was augmented by the fact that Chaitén is located next to the six priority hotspots for geothermal generation in Chile, which would allow the new town to reduce its current dependence on a 60-mile high-voltage line and a diesel plant.

The task force considered three key factors to direct its work. The first was to preserve the community and relief workers from natural risks (volcanic eruption, flooding, earthquakes), urban risks (fires, short-circuits and structural collapse) and health hazards (plague, infectious diseases and respiratory problems associated with exposure to silica from ashes). Second, it sought to preserve, wherever possible, public and private property, particularly that of displaced families, taking into consideration tangible and intangible values such as their history, culture and traditions. Finally, it aimed to lay the basis for the sustainable future development of the town and the region by maintaining a simultaneous vision of emergency and long-term planning, understanding the process as the transition from catastrophe to opportunity.

#### FOUR PHASES OF THE CHAITÉN TASK FORCE

The first phase involved collecting all available social and territorial data for a comprehensive Geographic Information Service (GIS) database, in order to analyze the situation and elaborate a development vision. Chaitén, according to this vision, would be rebuilt or relocated as a city of the future, planned for the

### The task force developed a simultaneous vision of long-term sustainable urban planning, design and development and immediate disaster relief.

next 50 years and not simply as a replica of the existing town. It would be a thriving town with new economic activities that could add value to the region, starting with the reconstruction process as the main driving force. It would also be exemplary for its environmentally friendly, carbon-neutral development, with a reduced ecological footprint, self-sufficiency and lower dependence on mainland Chile. It could become a prime international tourist destination, thanks to its landscape, white-water rivers, fly fishing, rich culture and even the volcano itself. In short, the task force showed that Chaitén had the potential to become a model of community participation and cohesion. The Chaiteninos' understanding of the restrictions and opportunities inherent in the events that drew attention to this remote land has allowed them to articulate their own vision and history of colonization and dialogue with natural forces.

The second phase assessed the viability of reconstruction on the original site and carried out preliminary analysis of potential sites for relocation. Social and economic cost-benefit analysis of reconstruction at the original location demonstrated that the risks and costs involved were higher than for comparable lo-

cations. Following the recommendation for relocation, specialists from the engineering firm Arup, which had joined the task force, carried out their Sustainable Projects Appraisal Routine (SPeAR®), and developed a new methodology (MeAL®) enabling the group to objectively assess and compare five different relocation scenarios from a cost-benefit standpoint. The scenarios were presented to a special ministerial committee that reduced the potential scenarios to two alternatives.

The third phase involved advanced evaluation of the two alternative sites for relocation, development of a design master plan and recommendations for implementation. Following the results of this analysis and other studies by governmental agencies, the Minister of the Interior announced in February 2009 that Chaitén would be relocated to Santa Barbara, six miles north of Chaitén at a site protected from the volcano. The fourth and final phase involved presenting the work to the general public, with several meetings with the displaced communities, giving the Chaiteninos an opportunity to understand and take part in the decision-making process.

When the task force completed its work in April 2009, the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism, and the Regional Government, took over the planning and construction process, developing a series of studies and actions to secure the rebirth of Chaitén as a competitive, sustainable and thriving gateway to Patagonia. Studies for a new port and construction of a new airfield in Santa Barbara are underway and a special fund has been dedicated in the nation's budget for the reconstruction efforts. Last June, President Michelle Bachelet visited Santa Barbara and officially opened Chaitén's new temporary municipal and police facilities.

A final Master Plan for Santa Barbara is expected to be in place this spring. By 2011, at least a third of the original Chaiteninos will have returned, authorities say. There is still uncertainty on how much the vision and opportunities described by the task force can be implemented, but the groundwork has been done for the development of a national strategy for post-disaster planning. An evaluation of the socio-economic losses and damages could allow not just Chaitén, but any other city confronted with a disaster, to rise from the ashes.

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*\*An earlier version of this article was published in "Environment and Poverty Times" a UNEP/UNIDO/UNESCAP publication.*



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# LIVING THE ENVIRONMENT

Architects shape the environment, and the environment shapes society. From landscape architecture to the use of sustainable materials, new visions are emerging throughout the continent. And Latin American and Latin@ architects are imagining new forms that shape the environment of the North with ideas from the South.

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# Beyond Nature

Parks Shaping Society **BY ANITA BERRIZBEITIA**

**THE PARQUE DEL ESTE IN CARACAS, VENEZUELA,** was designed by noted Brazilian landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx (1909-1994). Built between 1956 and 1961, it opened at a critical time in Venezuela's history, during the onset of what was to be its longest period of democracy. The park was also the keystone piece in the expansion of the city, which had experienced vertiginous growth as Venezuela evolved from an agricultural economy to a wealthy oil producer.

Originally conceptualized as a public ground for the exhibition of tropical flora, Parque del Este is the most intensely used public space in Caracas. The park hosts three distinct spaces. The first is an open, fluid landscape of grassy fields with a subtle and gently undulating topography and loosely laid-out canopy trees, popularly used for picnics and games. The second is a forested, spatially dense landscape with meandering paths, used primarily for strolling and quiet contemplation. The third is a sequence of paved, intimate courtyard gardens that invoke the Spanish colonial past of Venezuelan culture and display plants, tiled murals and water works. Within these spaces visitors are confronted with the rich variety and exuberance of tropical flora, with a small but significant zoological collection of species from different regions of Venezuela. The park is, like most large urban parks, a "green" oasis in the middle of the congested, dirty and noisy city. It is important, however, to point out from the outset that Parque del Este is not a conventionally naturalistic park that could easily be confused with a piece of countryside set inside the heavily built environment. It is, instead, clearly a constructed urban landscape, remarkable for its visual, spatial and material richness.

As a recreational public space within the context of a designed landscape,

Parque del Este was a new experience for Caraqueños. Although two parks of significant size had been built in Caracas, El Calvario in 1874 and Los Caobos in 1924, they were located at what were then the outskirts of the city. They faced serious competition with the smaller but omnipresent plazas that constituted the public space of everyday life Caracas. The colonial city was a pedestrian, densely built city, and the plazas' life hinged on pedestrian traffic throughout the day. When Caraqueños abandoned the colonial city for modern suburbs, they also abandoned a mode of recreation and public life that centered around the plaza. Parque del Este absorbed those functions and offered a new and much broader spectrum of recreational possibilities than the earlier parks, signaling an entire new way of engaging public spaces and nature.

No other parks of the size and programmatic scope of Parque del Este have been built in Caracas. Yet the city has grown beyond all expectations. Around the "city of eternal spring," as Caracas has been widely known, there are now extra-legal settlements so extensive that some reach upwards of 200,000 inhabitants. Conservative estimates calculate that more than half of the city's four million inhabitants live in barrios. Venezuela's urban poor make up 80% of the population. Six out of every ten of these urban poor live in extra-legal settlements around the country's north shore. Parque del Este is today, most fundamentally, a middle ground between the two opposing realities of the city. What is the basis for this middle ground? First, like parks at their best, Parque del Este is an intensely used public space where people of all social classes meet. The park's popularity has exceeded all expectations. Planned for 6,000 visitors per week, it received 65,000 visitors per week by 1990. The



park has developed into a veritable common ground for all Caraqueños, irrespective of social class. It is used with equal intensity by people from the barrios and by people from the affluent neighborhoods of the city. To the initial program established by Burle Marx—people-watching, strolling, eating and playing—have been added courts for basketball, soccer, volleyball, and ping-pong, and a 1.6 mile-long jogging course. In addition, religious, dance and sports clubs regularly use the park to meet. Burle Marx's tropical stage sets have become the prime site of contemporary metropolitan life. Particularly compelling is the introduction of the private, domestic realm into the space of the park. Ten kiosks located throughout the park are often used for the celebration of birthday piñatas, first communions and other family events.



**Parque del Este, view of the Lago de Coro-coros, circa 1963. Parque del Este was designed by Roberto Burle Marx, the great Brazilian landscape architect, and it is his most important work in Caracas.**

justification for parks. The case of Caracas, however, questions the primacy given to this concept. There is plenty of nature in Caracas. The city is located within a magnificent natural setting, El Avila, and within short distances of extraordinary natural landscapes. More importantly, barrio dwellers, for whom use of the park is most critical, live in nature more than anyone else. Built on vulnerable sites, their dwellings exist amidst the cycles of flooding, drought and earthquakes, not to mention their own human-induced ecological conditions. Nature, as an unqualified concept disengaged from the social and the aesthetic, is not enough, not even meaningful, in contemporary Venezuela. Furthermore, it is precisely these extreme social and environmental conditions in the urban environment that bring out in full force the social content of art and ecology in the work of Burle Marx. Nature, although the primary material component of the park, is not per se the primary experience of the park in the sense that it is not presented as raw or “naturalized” nature, but condensed in time and space so that its aesthetic aspects are immediately available and accessible, so that its beauty is visible. It is precisely this shared experience of looking at the marvels of nature, the generosity of its presence and of its beauty, that constitutes the primary experience of the park and the shared middle ground between opposing realities in the city.

We rarely discuss or explore beauty or aesthetics in the design fields. We have not, in fact, for the last twenty or thirty years. It has become the great taboo, considered elitist, anti-ecological and anti-social. In Burle Marx’s work, however, beauty has real-world agency; it is not merely an idealized utopian realm. Burle Marx’s conception of beauty extended beyond the purely visual to the operational, and emerges more poignantly

as a tool for larger social and ecological ambitions. In his work, beauty is distributional, demanding, inclusive and de-centering. Throughout his 62-year-long career Burle Marx argued with equal intensity for the aesthetic, the social, and the ecological motives behind his work, and fought endlessly against the senseless destruction of the tropical environment. Within this larger agenda, beauty was engaged for its distributional effects, that is, the belief that to enable the appreciation of nature within the context of an urban park would have the effect of extending that appreciation beyond, towards the protection of the greater natural environment (Scarry, Elaine, 1999, *On Beauty and Being Just*, Princeton University Press, 1999. I am indebted to this work for the concept of beauty as a value of fairness).

The representation of native plants within the context of an artistic practice and in an urban environment was a social and ecological act. A social act, because through design, Burle Marx made available significant knowledge about the environment that would otherwise remain inaccessible to most urban dwellers. An ecological act, because he saw parks, and their nurseries, as places where endangered plant species would be preserved and protected from extinction.

The social and the ecological came together, finally, in aesthetic experience: “...teach [them] to see the complexity that is nature, where the most amazing associations awake aesthetic emotions, brought out by the forms, the rhythms, the exuberance of colors.” (Burle Marx, 1983) Nature in his design is aestheticized precisely in order to fulfill his social and ecological function.

However, this is not the distant, background beauty of pictorial landscapes. This is demanding beauty, beauty that requires the active engagement of the eye with the mind, beauty that requires perceptual acuity. Nor is this the fuzzy, “milk-toast,” easy, comforting and homogeneous beauty of sustainable, non-descript landscapes. This is beauty that is inclusive; it celebrates the tough, the

Parque del Este is a democratic space in the sense that it offers people of all social classes a full spectrum of possibilities for the unfolding of their lives. It works as a public landscape because it enables visitors to appropriate its grounds for a multiplicity of their own uses, thus allowing them to construct their own modes of social practice. If we take the definition of public space as being a place where multiple and not necessarily prescribed or compatible functions coexist, then we can say that Parque del Este is a public space in the fullest sense of the word.

Second, as a work of public art, widely present and available to all, the park is the only access all Caraqueños, and especially barrio dwellers, have to visual culture, to design, to art. We seem to insist, here in the West, on the so-called experience of nature as the prime conceptual

multiple, and the complex, as well as the simple, the harmonious, the serene, and the resolved.

Finally, at Parque del Este, beauty also has decentering effects— that is, beauty exerts pressure on a person's focus from the self outward, towards a shared experience with others. Beyond its function as social condenser, open living room, or ground for physical exercise, the park is, in Scarry's words, a place where "intense somatic pleasure, the sentient immediacy of the experience of beauty" is available across social classes. Throughout the park, beauty appears everywhere, not as elitist and superficial, but as an experience that is made fundamental, egalitarian and fair. As social conditions in metropolitan areas become more extreme throughout the world, with the proliferation of migration, poverty and informal economies, Burle Marx's work re-introduces and re-directs aesthetic experience in landscapes towards a new role in the social and ecological health of extreme urban environments. Today, Burle Marx's work is one of the most powerful defenses of the ecological and social potential of aesthetically powerful and beautiful landscapes.

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# Autonomy Revisited

## How Latin America Can Lead the Way Towards Sustainable Design **BY EDUARDO BERLIN RAZMILIC**

**NOT SO LONG AGO SETTLEMENTS AND DWELLINGS** throughout the globe were altogether autonomous, dependent only on nature's shifting generosity and relying on effectively and intelligently making the most out of that generosity. Then *progress* came and, with it, an elaborate circuitry that promised to make our lives better if only we could pay for it. We know now this resulted in a bio-network challenged to address increasing demands with diminishing resources. Ultimately, the planet had to pay.

And so we are trying to fix the situation.

As far as sustainability is concerned, Latin America stands in a privileged position amidst the global context. Its potential for renewable energy sources—hydraulic, biomass, and solar—is enormous. More than 90% of its land falls within the region known as the solar belt (between latitudes 40°N and 40°S). Its hydraulic potential is excellent, and Latin America is by far the most promising biomass productive region, with more than 50% of productive forest area, and an average annual fuel-wood production of almost 0.5 metric tons per capita, according to the World Energy Council's Survey of Energy Resources (Elsevier, Oxford 2004).

Over the last decade, environmental issues have, timidly but steadily, become part of diverse agendas. However, the lack of necessary resources, strong political will and technical expertise have made development in this arena extremely lethargic and public awareness and engagement, scarce. Efforts to implement green technologies, renewable energy sources, or sustainable design practices are not coming from governments motivated by concern for global warming, ecology and the future of our planet. Interest in these

areas is generally aroused by energetic dependencies and their geopolitical implications. Other motivating factors are the region's endemic social debt represented by millions underserved, as well as the increasing regard for cultural values, native traditions and autonomy in every sense and at every scale.

These ideals will most likely push forward the agenda in the years to come, and Latin America may first see its crystallization steered by the following driving forces.

### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Many of today's programs, publicly subsidized or sponsored by NGOs and non-profits, specifically involve infrastructure by sustainable means, targeted at underserved communities. By implementing autonomous systems, namely power generation, storm-water collection, desalination, wastewater treatment and waste management, entire communities are given adequate up-to-date standards. Moreover, they are also enabled to preserve both their physical and economic autonomy, not afflicting the built environment with the stress of urban infrastructure nor burdening their finances with a high price tag for these services.

This also means that entire marginal communities and settlements will become adequately served by leapfrogging, namely skipping traditional, less efficient, more polluting technologies and jumping directly to state-of-the-art, environmentally friendly ones.

In sites of natural preservation, cultural and/or traditional value, the merits of off-grid solutions are self-evident. This trend should rapidly accelerate as the technologies are currently in the threshold of significant production cost reductions. As expertise becomes widespread





From top left, clockwise: The bamboo skin performs collaboratively with the wood framing for an ultra-light structural solution; modular bookshelves; finished school

and prices lower, we will see these solutions applied extensively, both planned and spontaneous, from rural and suburban settlements to the slums and *favelas*, encouraging independence, cultural preservation and social opportunity.

A substantial example of this is Túnquén in Casablanca, an isolated rustic ocean strip in central Chile, where a spontaneously off-grid community has been settling for the last 15 years, using photovoltaic panels for electricity, wells and water treatment systems, and gas-powered appliances. Once regarded as a disadvantage, it is now a matter of informed choice and environmental awareness and preservation of the natural world; once a critical mass was reached making it appealing to electrical companies to arrive, this same community has systematically refused to become “connected”, leaving the natural landscape untouched and using renewable energy and autonomous infrastructure.







Local stone, wood and soil are reordered into this sheltered, living space. The use of steel rods integrates soberly into the overall design (opposite page); the corridor organizes and contrast natural and man-built environments (left).

#### INFORMATION INTO KNOWLEDGE

The region's vernacular architecture and construction methods are embedded in tradition. They are widespread throughout Latin America, entangled with its folklore, heritage and culture. These construction methods remain very region-specific mainly because they are passed on through oral tradition from one generation to another without a writing system or formal documentation.

However ethereal, these techniques have arisen great interest especially for their potential as sustainable practices. Adobe construction, thatched roofs, natural shading devices, use of bamboo, patio architecture, stilt villages, passive cooling strategies and use of organic materials, among others, are all part of this informal collection of resources highly in touch with location, climate, and available natural resources.

Academia, along with public and private organizations, has been collecting and documenting this information; the challenge now is to turn this information into knowledge and furthermore, this knowledge into hard science available for planners, engineers and designers throughout the region in an attempt to professionalize and describe this *oral architecture*.

We should soon expect to have all these efforts and interpretations merge into straightforward, applicable and rep-

licable science and techniques with quantifiable data and results, available for all.

The design work of Al Borde Studio, based in Ecuador, and led by architects David Barragán and Pascual Gangotena, shows how this integration of traditional practices with current concerns, such as use of local materials, energy efficiency and low carbon footprint, results in innovative and solid architectural solutions; their delicate use of bamboo, straw and adobe, among other traditional materials, shine in their exploration for adaptation, efficiency and ecological balance. This reinterpretation of vernacular schemes and practices can be found in several of their projects.

#### DESIGNER'S LEADERSHIP

Like Al Borde Studio, an entire generation of professional designers and architects is partially responsible for the emphasis on the issue of Latin America's sustainability. The region's pre-crisis economic drive, along with its expanding cities, a comparatively cheaper labor and lighter regulatory framework, and the lack of predefined standards and paralyzing liabilities translate into a fertile ground for exploration within a wide scope. These professionals have capitalized on these factors with outstanding results.

Currently the world looks attentively at Latin American high-end design and the professionals responsible for it. Their

work, with particular emphasis on single and multi-family housing, educational facilities and public buildings, often leads the way to innovative solutions, use of alternative materials, and the reinterpretation of traditional practices by current design strategies.

These endeavors have also awakened the interest of large-scale corporations involved in engineering, design and architectural products. By developing custom solutions and materials for specific projects and architects, they utilize these initiatives as research and field-testing methods for potential product lines. This encounter of high-end technology, native practices and innovative design holds great promise for the extensive reach of these sustainable technologies in the future, eventually incorporating them into mass markets both within the region and throughout the world.

By and large, Latin America is certainly going on the right direction and has already acquired significant momentum. Conditions are quite exceptional considering there are not only relevant and consistent approaches but also, as we have seen, an enhanced environment for exploration. We stand today at a tipping point and we will most likely see an important shift towards autonomy and reliance on nature's erratic generosity. We will strongly depend on our capacity to sustainably and prudently make the most of it.

*Eduardo Berlin Razmilic is a Chilean architect. He graduated from Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile in 2000 and established his architectural studio in 2001 with strong emphasis in sustainability issues. He is currently a Master in Design Studies Candidate within the Advanced Studies Program at Harvard's Graduate School of Design.*





# Extreme Architecture

Are There No Other Ways to Innovate in Architecture? **BY HERNÁN MARCHANT**

**WHILE VISITING FAMILY IN CHILE IN DECEMBER 2009, I DECIDED TO** find out about new architectural developments here. I discovered that construction of the Costanera Center project had resumed. The Costanera Center, on hold since January 2009 because of the recession, is a planned US\$600 million commercial real estate development in Santiago. The tallest of the four buildings, Torre Gran Costanera, designed by Argentinean architect César Pelli, will be 984 feet high, making it the tallest building in South America.

Upon my return to the United States, I learned that the opening ceremony for the the world's tallest man-made structure—the Burj Khalifa—had taken place only a few days before on January 4, 2010. The tower in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, soars 2,717 feet with 160 floors served through 58 of the world's fastest elevators at 40 mph. The total cost for the Burj Khalifa project was about US\$1.5 billion.

These two projects share a common factor—sheer height,—reminding me of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's observation in his book *Difference and Repetition*, “The modern world is one of simulacra...All identities are only simulated, produced as an optical ‘effect’ by the more profound game of difference and repetition.”

These two buildings in Santiago and Dubai have many dif-

ferences, but also striking similarities. Each building is going to be considered as a sign of economic power in their respective regions. However, they have different though contextually appropriate heights and budgets. Both have had to perform feats of technical innovation to balance scale, height, foundation, and dense human use with protection from earthquakes and seismic activity, among other dangers. The Burj Khalifa is built in the middle of nowhere; the Torre Gran Costanera in the middle of a very congested downtown area.

These buildings represent one extreme position of the ideology behind architecture. On the other extreme, a faction with strong opposing views rallies against the negative effects of these huge-scale projects on our ecosystem. University of Florence Professor Alberto Magnaghi in his book *Progetto Locale*, observes, “In the rat race that leads to the construction of a second nature, artificial, our civilization has gradually stamped the territory which it treats as an area devoid of significance and buried under a mass of objects, works, functions, poisons.”

In a similar fashion, Serge Latouche, in his article “The Globe Downshifted” in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, observes “The organization Attac has appealed for ‘a move towards progressive and reasoned deceleration in world growth, under particular social conditions, as the first step towards reducing preda-



Left to right: Torre Gran Costanera; Burj Khalifa; Hotel Remota in Patagonia; Km 1.5 Camino de Puerto Natales a Torres del Paine, Patagonia, Chile, Germán del Sol, architect, 2006

tory and devastating production in all its forms.” In the same article, Latouche quotes Magnaghi suggesting “a long and complex period (50 to 100 years) of purification. During this period people will no longer be engaged in turning more and more fens and fallow land over to farming, nor in pushing transport links through such areas. Instead, we will set about cleaning up and rebuilding the environmental and territorial systems that have been destroyed and contaminated by human presence. In so doing, we shall create a new geography.”

These two polarized views described above, proclaiming either a *downshifted* or an *upshifted* world are extreme positions. Searching for a different attitude in the profession, I found architects in Chile proposing different ways of understanding the relationship between nature and architecture.

One of the most recent books about architecture in Chile, containing thirteen recent buildings, is *PULSO: New architecture in Chile*. Kenneth Frampton, who wrote the introduction, considers these buildings part of a Chilean renaissance of late modern architecture. Seven of them are located in isolated territories and propose a strong relationship with nature.

Germán del Sol, one of the Chilean architects featured in this book, makes a very good point in his blog: that Latin America has an ancient tradition of works of architecture that stand in

the midst of nature. Some are erected just to bring sign of life to places where shepherds and merchants passed or where people gathered to celebrate ancient rites. He says poetically:

Chile celebrates 500 years  
 Since America encountered Europe...  
 Until then, in America, we did not know  
 The inside of buildings  
 The interior was outside in the open air  
 The grand esplanades  
 Where our ancestors built pyramids  
 Or ball-courts like those of Uxmal or Monte Albán  
 Or palaces open to the sky like Chan-Chan  
 Or they would place a ceremonial rehué  
 Or geoglifos like those from Salar de Pintados  
 Or they would fill the main square of Cuzco  
 With beach sand from the sea  
 Because the environment of American culture  
 Became a culture of environment  
 They lived and still many live  
 In direct contact with nature  
 The European relation with nature  
 Has been filtered since the Middle Ages  
 By streets, plazas and cities.

*Chile celebra los 500 años del encuentro  
de América con Europa...  
Hasta entonces en América no conocíamos  
el espacio interior:  
la interioridad estaba afuera al aire libre,  
en las grandes explanadas  
donde nuestros antepasados construían pirámides,  
o salas de juego de pelota como las de Uxmal o Monte Albán,  
o palacios de salas abiertas al cielo como en Chan-Chan,  
o colocaban un rehué ceremonial,  
o geoglifos como los del Salar de Pintados,  
o llenaban una plaza principal de Cusco  
con arena de playas de mar,  
porque a los indígenas americanos  
el medio ambiente cultural les coincidía  
con su medio ambiente cultural.  
Vivían y aun muchos viven,  
en contacto directo con la naturaleza.  
La relación de los europeos con la naturaleza  
ha sido mediada desde la edad media,  
por la calle, y la plaza del pueblo o de la ciudad.*

Identifying and preserving Latin American cultural identity is a never-ending and unsolved story. Modern architecture in Latin America has been dealing with the idea of finding the good balance between historical roots and modern references since the first half of the 20th century without finding a solution. We could enjoy more success with integrating our traditions and roots if we try to understand this relationship between nature, landscape and architecture from pre-Columbian times.

Chile's strong and challenging climates and geographies provide a prime location for what author Ruth Slavid calls "extreme architecture." In *Extreme Architecture, Building for Challenging Environments*, Slavid analyzes the relationship between architecture and nature, drawing on Germán del Sol's projects such as Remota Hotel in Puerto Natales, Patagonia. The name "Extreme Architecture" refers to architecture built in extreme environments—all of them related to extreme conditions of localization and climate.

Building under these extreme constraints forces the architect to think about fundamental challenges: getting and transporting building materials, providing energy and power supply, disposing of waste, and managing the building process—giving special consideration to protecting the natural environment.

Germán del Sol began thinking about developing tourism in remote destinations in 1987. His Explora Tourism Company built, among other projects, hotels in San Pedro de Atacama, in the Atacama desert in northern Chile, Hotel Remota in Patagonia and Hotel Explora Patagonia in Torres del Paine, the latter in collaboration with José Cruz.

These projects are not only innovative for their locations. They grapple with unique, highly problematic constraints that have little precedent, and were designed with few architectural



**Casa de Baños del Ona. Torres del Paine National Park, Ultima Esperanza Province, Patagonia Occidental, Magallanes, Chile, 1992-1995**

references. "Design," Charles Eames, a U.S. designer and architect, says, "depends largely on constraints... one of the few effective keys to the design problem—[is] the ability of the designer to recognize as many of the constraints as possible—his willingness and enthusiasm for working within these constraints—the constraints of price, of size, of strength, balance, of surface, of time, etc; each problem has its own peculiar list."

Architectural references are widespread and immediately available in this highly digital age. Powerful images imprint their shadow on our ideas and senses. This ubiquity contributes to the increasing tendency of architecture to become homogenized all over the world. Considering the urban and/or natural context is thus crucial. In architecture, one size cannot fit all.

AIA Past President Marvin Malecha frequently quotes his mother who used to say: "If everybody is thinking the same thing, nobody is thinking very much." As long as we have different positions and different points of view on architecture we are innovating, not stagnating, which will put us in a better shape to face the future.

**Hernán Marchant** is Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies and Academic Support, College of Design, North Carolina State University.



# The (Not Yet) Dialogue Project

## A Deferred Conversation on Post-Unsustainability with Mark Jarzombek

BY SERGIO ALEJANDRO ARAYA

**SO I HAVE ANOTHER SIP OF MY COFFEE WHILE** looking out and enjoying the Chilean view. From here the city movement below seems to be in slow motion. The view is kind of foggy, not very crisp, but I still recognize the silhouette of Santiago's skyline, the towers downtown, the San Cristóbal hill in the back, the Andes on the other side of the room. All delineated against a foggy orange-tinted sunset sky. The light inside the room is warm; the orange hue is slowly turning pink and bleeds all over the space. The coffee mug in my hand is still warm and as everybody seems to have left, it is quiet in here now. But I know this sensation is only temporary; outside it is very noisy, probably very hot too. As I look out I can almost feel the warm and sticky gusts blasting through the city. I turn my chair towards the view and sit with my coffee, remembering that conversation I had some years ago with Mark Jarzombek. I was still living in Boston and it was a time when, I remember now, the discussion about buildings and the environment was a hot, sometimes overrated, never-ending debate everywhere. It was by the end of the decade I think, maybe 2010, that the term sustainable and its variations had flooded every cultural, economic and technical discourse.

**SERGIO ARAYA:** (...)well, Mark, you see, one of the biggest conflicts I have with sustainability is that you don't know anymore, if we actually ever did, what we are talking about. It is such a ubiquitous word and it is applied in so many different contexts with so many different connotations underlying so many diverse purposes, that it is hard not to use it, but on the other hand it is even harder to actually mean anything when using it. Are we talking about economi-

cal sustainability? Or social sustainability? Or actually environmental sustainability? And then what does it mean and what does it implies in the context of architecture? Somehow among architects the question has become a technical and normative topic.

**MARK JARZOMBEC:** The architect still has the capacity to navigate culturally, relatively freely, between the industry, business, sciences, the arts and so forth... and it's one of the few professions where that is understood.

**S.A.** Yes, but then even after entering any of these dimensions of sustainability, the architect still embodies, carries within, a specific way of looking at things, that is, its capacity to interrogate a situation and reformulate it. Architecture often borrows from other fields in order to reshape its own discourse and practice, but in this case, how much of its inquisitive and critical attitude is transformed by the powers and forces in action on these dimensions of sustainability? I suspect that somehow the urgency and global character of the sustainability challenge has prevented a critical and inquisitive approach from architecture. Actually sustainability has affected the architectural practice more than what architecture has helped shaped the idea of sustainability. So far.

**M.J.** Today, after 10 years or so, sustainability has become such a hot button topic that the architects have sort of focused on precise answers—we can solve it this way, we can do it better this way—and I think this is not that good. This is somewhat dangerous because then we become problem solvers, and we should be question makers, we should ask what are the questions first.

**S.A.** Of course, I agree with you on that. I remember Stan Anderson's statement

about architects being problem-worriers and not problem-solvers. Now are those universal questions or local questions? Are these questions the same in North and South America for example? I can tell you that although the dominant perspectives on this have been drawn by political and economical forces in the U.S. and Europe, the growing awareness coming from the developing world has different takes on the subject. Now, how can then the normative, recommendation and certification systems being currently implemented globally actually address these questions and localities? Isn't this faith on...commercially available, standardized answers counterproductive in this sense? Which sustainability challenge is this actually addressing? To me this is much more about guaranteeing extended resource exploitation and globalization of industry standards with an economic purpose, than it actually is about civilization and nature and the changes they face.

**M.J.** 1985 is the day, year, that the UNESCO signed some project saying that we are living in an unsustainable world. So if that is the case, this is sort of my argument, we are living in an unsustainable world. We will always be unsustainable. There will be no sustainability. Ever. So instead of fantasizing about what a sustainable world should look like, we should accept the fact that it is not sustainable, and it will never be sustainable, ever ever ever. And then it becomes much more depressing, but at the same time, I think, much more open... to... other types of thoughts, and more honest, I think, to the historical situation. Maybe we should build bunkers, maybe we should prepare cities for the water... rise.

**S.A.** What you are saying is that we should focus on designing a *present* fu-

ture, designing buildings and cities that are actually within their historical and ecological time? But at the same time, by building buildings, and cities, we do transform the environment, we do affect and change such conditions. The question is then, how much of that change changes the environment and how much of that change changes us? Of course we are not separate but part of the environment, but as we know, the timeframe of our species on this planet is on a different order than the timeframe of the planet itself. Along those same lines that you are commenting on, in 1987 J. Pezzey published an environment research paper at the World Bank where after acknowledging that the sustainability of our civilization is unattainable, he reframes the question in terms of timeframes. Sustainable for how long? Sustainable for one year, for 10 years or for 100 years? In that sense, I would say a sustainable strategy is not to try to stop change, but to try to understand it, adapt to it and survive. To evolve. Asking for when and for how long are poignant questions then. How are the buildings that we should design under such a paradigm?

**M.J.** You can have a sustainable building, you know, I don't know, a building could be perfectly sustainable ... so what? (laugh) ...You know, we need to build 10



diate, trying to preserve what we had and that is clearly mutating into something new? There is a sense of panic or urgency about these changes. Yet I believe these same changes can be seen as opportunities to build anew. But all we see around are attempts to reduce and restrain. Use less energy, use less materials, produce less, consume less, travel less...

**M.J.** And the answers often, once again, are either technical or implausibly utopian. And I think that, somewhere between these two, there is definitely a

that designers should reformulate the concept. Maybe it should be called something else. What today is a recurrent effort to find these palliative measures should become a positive attitude towards accepting the changes and finding opportunities in them. Sustainability discourse today is either influenced by the notion that via regulation, policy making and restrictive practices we would stop and even reverse the environmental changes in effect, or by the idea that we should go back to old practices and ways of living as it was before industrialization in order to regain balance with the natural environment. Many look at Latin America with those eyes, as a resource that should be preserved, frozen from development, as a way to guarantee its survival and balance the equation. Sustainable initiatives arise everywhere to save forests, rivers, complete ecosystems, many times through ad-hoc policies, sometimes through policy loopholes. Is freezing—and preserving—nature an alternative? Is it possible to achieve this kind of temporal micro-sustainability? Can this apply to architecture in that sense? Micro-ecosystems preserved from global change? I mean, I don't think we should destroy and consume nature, but this overly romanticized notion of nature is as dangerous. Nature can be hostile too. Species

## The false optimism that we will be sustainable is very dangerous.

million, or a hundred million to have *any* impact. So does that do any good? No I don't think so. I think... you know, you can say that Lichtenstein is sustainable, but the entire globe is burning up.

**S.A.** The challenge then is how we should reshape the environment built by architecture. Since it is not just a matter of adding, patching or incorporating fragments of nature into built cities. In a way it is kind of obvious, but shouldn't the task at hand be to build the environment instead of trying to heal and reme-

space which one can operate, which is not defined by, I don't know, the cynicism of giving up and saying... you know...

In some sense you forget the terror, and... I mean, one is that you don't have the false optimism that we will be sustainable, which I think that is a faux promise, which is very dangerous. So if we get rid of that and we admit that we are living in a fucked up world, you know, we can have more fun, in some sense you know.

**S.A.** But that implies two things, first,



Image from project “Phototaxic Anagenics,” Sergio Araya, 2009: “Like animal skin, the building’s integument will grow synthetic fur, following the sun light orbit and climate patterns, the surfaces will grow photophoric follicles. The new smart composite skin captures light due to its continuous distribution, distributes it through the meshed network of fibers embedded on the skin, and displays light on a different area of the buildings surface or interiors space. The building skin is a photoreceptive surface and a translucent threedimensional display system.”

do become extinct when natural changes happen. In fact, it can also be seen in the contrary way, nature is trying to get rid of us; it is us who are unsustainable, not the environment.

The current state of affairs in our region is that as developing countries struggle for economic growth, ironically pressures and criticism from the first world about their resources exploitation and industrialization practices become stronger, not without a big dose of cynicism, of course. The response from the developing countries is either through embracing regulation, usually adapted from those developed nations or by importing technology that on one hand it’s promoted convincingly as sustainable and green, yet more economically sustainable than anything, while on the other hand it only increases the anxiety about a crisis that has to be resolved by alleviating symptoms and mediating interaction through technology, therefore increasing the dependency to the

developed countries. If the questions are about our evolving relation with the environment, and from an architectural perspective, about how architecture should or should not build such environment, how do you see architects reacting to them? How should architects in the developing countries, where the natural environment is still vastly untouched, react? How do we overcome the fear of change and avoid buying into the new *green* economy?

**M.J.** So if we try to get rid of these huge compulsions, and work in some sense in a cultural level, and introduce irony and fun—and wit—and try to in some sense be more open about putting these things together, it may not save the world, but many, many little fixes will add up to a change. I think that’s true and it’s our only way to participate in it, but the idea that all these little changes will in 40 years make a world that is “sustainable”... I don’t believe that, I think that it is too easy to get seduced by the opti-

mism of that argument. So the ethical argument is sort of two sided, is not just that more ethics make a better world, I mean, you need better people, to make a better world.

(Today, that phrase still resonates in my head).

But things are different now, things have changed.

It is not the same world now, and you know, it is not that bad.

I look again at the optic fibers on the wall, the ones that carry all the light into this office room from around a hundred feet above. Over the smog cloud, where the light is brighter and the air that is absorbed and filtered through the walls is better and cooler. I am still amazed by the fact that this building photosynthesizes its own energy. Buildings are no longer *in* an environment, they *are* environment. And it is only going to get better.

**NOTE:** This conversation has not (yet) happened. Extracts are from an interview that Mark Jarzombek gave at the Colegio de Arquitectos in Murcia, Spain. The author and Jarzombek have maintained extensive online exchanges about these topics. Jarzombek reviewed and approved the fictional script. **MARK JARZOMBEC** is Professor of History and Theory of Architecture at MIT. He is Associate Dean and was until recently Director of the History, Theory and Criticism Program at the School of Architecture at MIT.

*Sergio Araya is an architect, graduated from Catholic University of Chile (PUC). He holds a MArch from PUC, a SMArchs degree from MIT and currently is a PhD candidate at MIT, Design and Computation. He is an Assistant Professor at PUC, and has taught in Chile and in the United States at various universities. He is also founder of SPARC, a research practice that explores the relations between body and space through performative spaces. His work has been published in Europe, Asia and the United States.*





The Edificio Interbank is a building in the Victoria district in Lima. Inaugurated in 2001, it is headquarters for Interbank, a Peruvian financial entity. The building spawned the growth of a financial district in San Isidro.

# Modernity in Peru

A Photo Reflection **BY MARCO SIMOLA**

WHEN ONE THINKS OF PERU, ONE MIGHT THINK OF COLONIAL PLAZAS or the splendid pre-Columbian Incan masterpiece of Macchu Picchu.

Yet, as photographer Marco Simola portrays with his compelling architectural photos, Peru is also architectural modernity, a cutting-edge medley of buildings.

The past, however, is not left entirely behind. The Interbank Building, which Wikipedia calls one of the thirteen most spectacular buildings in the world, uses Andean volcano rock in its entrance, drawing on an ancient Incan tradition.

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The Peruvian firm Cosapi constructed the building with a design by Austrian architect Hans Hollein. The building was inaugurated around the same time as the architect's Media Tower in Vienna, with both projects being designed simultaneously.

The Interbank building has two distinct towers that are interlinked. The 20-floor Tower A is slightly tilted, taking on the form of a sail carried by the wind, reinforced by titanium. Tower A soars 289 feet into the air and is crowned with a heliport. Tower B is a six-floor rectangular construction with outside walls of white glass, looking in to offices and a cafeteria.

The tilting of the first tower is not only for aesthetic effect, but is an anti-seismic device developed by Carlos Casabonne Rasselet. The plaza in front of the buildings is constructed with volcanic rock, in accordance with ancient Peruvian tradition.

Wikipedia has named the Interbank Building as one of the 13 most spectacular in Latin America.



**Above: New buildings in San Isidro district, on the entrance of Miguel Dasso Road; below: Wiese Bank building in San Isidro district at the intersection between Avenida Canaval y Moreyra and Avenida República de Panama**





# Latinotopia

Puerto Rican Architects in New York **BY ANTONI BERNAT**

**THE MOORS SETTLED, LIVED AND THRIVED IN** southern Spain for 700 years. Puerto Ricans have settled, lived, and thrived in New York City for almost 100 years now. With 600 more years to go, the expressions and contributions of this transported culture are likely to become even more prominent.

Architects often make the invisible visible. At times economic, social, and political forces, which are often felt but hardly seen, are given precise concrete form by architects.

The early documented green shoots

of Puerto Rican architects in New York City date to the 1960s during and as a parallel development to the Civil Rights Movement. Puerto Rican architects Carlos Quintanilla, Luis Aponte-Pares and Lee Borrero pioneered a grass-roots organization with ties to East Harlem/El Barrio that became known as the Real Great Society (See Luis Aponte-Pares' essay of 1999 in *Latino Social Movements* journal). Sanchez & Figueroa, a now dissolved Puerto Rican architectural firm, worked on projects in the Bronx.

It usually takes two or three genera-

tions for a society (or a community of recent settlers) to begin to acquire the economic and political wherewithal to hire its own architects (first come the doctors and the lawyers) to build from scratch, or even to renovate the built environment that already was built before their arrival. This point of inflection may have been reached by the mid-1970s in Manhattan. It appears that the first major building co-designed by a Latino architect was the twin-towered housing complex known as Schomburg Plaza (1975) on Fifth Avenue and Duke Ellington Circle (see *New*





*York 1960* by Robert A.M. Stern, et. al.) Colombian-born architect David Castro-Blanco, the founder of Castro-Blanco Piscioneri & Feder in Manhattan, teamed up with Gruzen & Partners architects to design what metaphorically became the gateway for all the other Latino architects that followed.

What is well documented and known is the presence and influence of Argentine architects who settled professionally in New York following educational paths or fleeing political repression in Argentina starting in the mid-1970s. The

**Left to right: Frank X. Moya, Matthews Moya Architects, Affirmation Arts, New York, NY, 2008; Luis Salazar and Maria Antonia Rosselló, Salazar + Rosselló Architecture, The Vaux, 372 Central Park West, New York, NY, 2002**

## A critical mass may have been reached. New York is now Latinotopia—a city increasingly being designed and shaped by Latino architects, many of them Puerto Ricans.

spectrum of practices was, and remains, wide—from the high rises by Cesar Pelli to houses by Susana Torre; from the theoretical treatises of Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas to the unbuilt urban scheme of Lincoln West by Rafael Viñoly, to mention but a few. And, of course, there are many other Latino architects who have settled in New York with their own practices. There is also the occasional architect from Latin America commissioned to do a project in New York City, or who set up a small satellite presence

in the city in order to gain a toe hold in a hyper-competitive environment. What is different with the Puerto Rican architects is the enormity of the population residing in the city of Puerto Rican heritage that may commission them. Greater New York accounts for the largest number of Puerto Ricans outside the island. It is often said, even by the elected Mayors of New York City, that Puerto Rico is the sixth Borough of the city—after Brooklyn, Bronx, Queens, Staten Island and Manhattan—or conversely that the city is





**Jonathan Marvel, Rogers Marvel Architects,  
1 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY, 2005-2007;  
Agustín Ayuso, Ayuso Architecture,  
38 Wilson Avenue, Brooklyn, NY, 2009**

Puerto Rico's largest town with 1.5 million Puerto Ricans in the metropolitan region. There are no comparables with other Latinos in the Northeast.

A critical mass may have been reached. New York is now Latinotopia—a city increasingly being designed and shaped by Latino architects, many of them Puerto Ricans. If the public in New York City is 30% Latino (going on to 50%), then public space should rightfully be designed by Latino architects as well. In 1998, when the seminal exhibition *Dream Houses*:



Clockwise from top left: Carlos Rodríguez Infanzón, Rodríguez Studio Architecture, Reservoir Viewfinder House, Croton on Hudson, NY, 2008- ; Madeleine Sanchez, Madeleine Sanchez Architect, house in Chappaqua, NY, 2009-in construction; Celeste Umpierre, CU--A, house addition in the Catskills, NY, 2008-09; Ruperto Arvelo, Arvelo Architecture + Design, Lofredo Residence, Long Island City, NY, 2007

*Three Latino Constructions* opened in New York at the Hostos Center for the Arts and Culture, the *New York Times* reported six architectural firms founded by Puerto Ricans. Five years later the number increased to eight firms. Today there are twelve. If this rate continues there will be 25 architectural practices headed by Puerto Ricans in New York City by 2015.

Much of this history remains to be written. In the interest of advancing an understanding, here is a photographic essay with recent projects by established firms in New York City founded by Puerto Rican architects. The practices range from solo practitioners to full fledged medium-sized firms with projects all over the United States and, of course, Puerto Rico. If any pattern is discernible it is a commitment to modern forms and buildable constructs—from single family private homes to multi-story residential

buildings. Modernity is perhaps the influence they all acquired via Puerto Rico—an island where the Modern Movement took root. This architecture history is waiting to be written. In the meantime, we can enjoy its visual presence.

That Puerto Rican architects are flourishing in the most global of global cities is a sign that the future holds a new manifest destiny. As the Cuba-born and Puerto Rico-educated conceptual artist Felix Gonzalez Torres once expressed in a large outdoor billboard in Chelsea—where he had later settled in New York City—with a stark graphic design in white letters on a black background: *It's Just A Matter of Time*.

**Antoni Bernat** is an architecture and cultural critic based in Barcelona, Spain. He writes for the daily newspaper *La Vanguardia* and the architecture journal *Quaderns*.

**Warren James** curated the article and photos in this section. Born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, he was educated at Cornell University (B. Arch.) and at Columbia University (M.S. Arch.). He also studied at Harvard and at the *Ecole Speciale d'Architecture in Paris*.

After collaborating with Robert A.M. Stern in New York and Ricardo Bofill in Barcelona he founded Warren A. James Architects + Planners, in 1988, in Manhattan. Current projects include designs for housing and expansions for Columbia University, Lincoln Center, and Museo de Arte de Caguas in Puerto Rico. His architectural drawings are in the permanent collection of the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, and the Centre Canadien d'Architecture in Montreal.

He wishes to thank Jorge Silvetti for inspiring Architecture.



# Difference and Repetition

The Argentinean New Wave **INTERVIEWS BY MARIA GUEST**

"Despite distance, we all belong to one or more service providers: the old boy Century Club network, the gay curators, the ex-pat New Yorkers, the wannabe Eurotrash, the genuine Eurotrash, the international upstarts, the desperately fashion-conscious deans, the desperately everything-conscious journalists, the p.c. nags, the young academics, the unionized staff, the kids-in-the-know, those-who-haven't-heard-anything, and the Argentines."

—R.E. Somol, "Pass it on..." Log 3  
(Fall, 2004): 6

Although jocular in tone the remark by Robert E. Somol, a leading architecture critic and historian, alludes to the status of the Argentines as a distinct group in architectural culture. The following excerpts from interviews with a number of Argentine architects practicing in the United States today will examine the various constituents and interests of the group and situate its energies within a broader historical context.

**SPANNING THE COURSE OF FOUR DECADES AND OCCURRING IN TWO DISTINCT waves**, a significant number of Argentinean architects have exerted a profound influence upon the discipline and experimental practices of architecture in the United States today. Indeed, each group is inextricably linked to specific trends of postwar avant-garde architecture, and can be related to two specifically charged episodes in architectural discourse.

The first group consists of Argentinean émigré architects embedded at the core of Ivy League schools and the leading architectural schools in the country. They include Rodolfo Machado and Jorge Silvetti at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, Diana Agrest at The Cooper Union, Mario Gandelsonas at Princeton University, Emilio Ambasz, Rafael Viñoly, and Cesar Pelli at Yale University. Many of these architects studied together at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), and later at the Centre Recherche d'Urbanisme in Paris in the late 1960s, a period coinciding with the political and social unrest unraveling Argentina throughout the 1960s and 1970s which undoubtedly informed their decision to remain abroad. Heavily influenced by French literary theorists such as Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes and Gaston Bachelard, this first wave of Argentine transplants were among the first to explore the relationship between Architecture and Semiotics, Linguistics, Structuralism and later Post-Structuralism. Prolific writers and dedicated educators, the first generation of Argentinean émigré architects have remained instrumental in the field of architecture and their thinking continues to resonate today.

The second, more recent generation of Argentinean architects—the new wave of experimental designers and thinkers—includes Hernan Díaz Alonso, Juan Azulay, Pablo Eiroa, Georgina Huljich, Mariana Ibañez, Ciro Najle, Florencia Pita, Alexis Rochas, Galia Solomonoff, Marcelo Spina and Maxi Spina, most of them interviewed for this article. Like their predecessors, most of these young architects received their early training in Argentina—Díaz Alonso, Huljich, Pita, Spina and Spina at Universidad Nacional de Rosario; Azulay, Ibañez, Najle and Rochas at UBA—before traveling abroad to complete post-graduate degrees at universities invested in more avant-garde design and theory. The majority graduated from Columbia University (with the exception of Huljich who attended University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), Ibañez who graduated from the Architectural Association in London, and Rochas who was at The Cooper Union in New York), and it is important to note that during the late 1990s and early 2000s when this young generation completed their studies these schools were pioneers in the realm of digital computation, fabrication, and conjectural modes of architectural formalism.

Today, many of these young architects practice on the West Coast, established—like their earlier counterparts—within the most influential academic circles (Southern California Institute of Architects (SCI\_Arc) and University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) and as leading voices in both academe and architectural practice, while a few have remained on the east coast, equally invested in speculative practices and teaching (Harvard GSD and Columbia GSAPP). The following interview is a highly edited, associative compilation of answers to broad questions probing the idea of a possible Argentine collective informed by the obvious filiations of their shared backgrounds, their disciplinary affiliations, and the relevance of their new contexts. Whether or not their postcritical, computational, Deleuzian take on the discipline is directly informed by its collective backgrounds will remain subject to interpretation, but what is certain is that their contribution to the discipline and the rigor brought to Architecture by their collective intellect is as relevant today as it was four decades ago.

**MG:** *Do you consider yourselves part of an intellectual collective of Argentinean architects that have a strong and defined presence abroad, and as such, were figures such as Machado, Silvetti, Agrest, Gandelsonas, Pelli, Ambasz, Viñoly, a point of reference to you when you decided to study abroad and establish yourselves outside of Argentina?*

**ROCHAS:** First of all let me start by saying that being Argentinean is a really interesting fiction, a type of fiction I very much embrace. There's a whole history of literary movements trying to define the country. I do believe this is an incredibly fresh way to identify oneself. And that's the culture I come from. As far as if there's an Argentinean collective; not really. I think it's more like water in the landscape, it somehow, for some reason, finds its way down to the ocean, transforming the landscape as it runs. Our reasons for leaving were very different from those of an earlier generation, and so their trajectories were not considered as a reference point. I came here at the height of Menemism when the country was booming with strenuous exuberance, it was a good time to move on. As opposed to my predecessors who may have moved for other reasons—political or whatever it was. That sets a very different tone from the previous generation.

**IBAÑEZ:** The presence of Argentineans is quite evident in the architectural landscape of the US, and while I am aware of my compatriots, their work and academic influence (and, most importantly, their friendship) I certainly endeavor to establish my own pursuits. These are based on criteria that are not necessarily shared by—or mindful of—a collective model. However, our domains of interest do overlap and I am interested in and intrigued by their production in regards to the discipline. The cultural environment in which we were raised remains within us all, but broadly speaking, I could identify two factors that served as triggers when deciding to live and practice abroad: one that is internal to the profession—the search for a different intellectual environment—and one that is external and related to conditions of context.

**MAXI SPINA:** I like to think of myself as belonging to somewhat of a collective consciousness, maintained by a group of architects (namely, Hernán Díaz Alonso, Georgina Huljich, Florencia Pita and Marcelo Spina, to name a few), characterized, by and large, by a critical attitude towards architecture and culture in gen-

## THE ARCHITECTS

**HERNAN DIAZ ALONSO** is the principal and founder of Xefirotarch, based in Los Angeles. He is Distinguished Professor of Architecture at SCI\_Arc, Design Studio Professor at Columbia GSAPP, and Head Professor of “the EXCESSIVE program” at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. He worked as a designer in the office of Enric Miralles in Barcelona, and was senior designer at Eisenman Architects in New York. Diaz Alonso received his architecture degrees from the National University of Rosario, Argentina, and from Columbia University's AAD Program, from which he graduated with honors.

**JUAN AZULAY** is the director of the 10-year-old Los Angeles-based firm Matter Management. His award-winning practice ranges widely in discipline, methodology and media. Azulay received his B.Arch. from SCI\_Arc and his Master of Science in Advanced Architectural Design (MSAAD) from Columbia. He is currently on the Design, Mediascapes and Visual Studies Faculty at SCI\_Arc.

**GEORGINA HULJICH** graduated from the National University of Rosario, Argentina and received her Master degree from the University of California in Los Angeles. She is co-principal of PATTERNS and Design faculty and JumpStart Program Director at the Department of Architecture and Urban Design at UCLA. She was the 2005-2006 Maybeck Fellow at the University of California in Berkeley.

**MARIANA IBAÑEZ** is Assistant Professor of Architecture at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design. She received her first degree from the University of Buenos Aires to then attend the Architectural Association in London for her Master of Architecture. After her graduate studies, she joined the Advanced Geometry Unit at ARUP before going to the office of Zaha Hadid. In 2006, Mariana relocated to Cambridge and co-founded I|Kstudio with partner Simon Kim.

**CIRO NAJLE**, an architect and design critic at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design, is the Director of General Design Bureau in Buenos Aires and of Mlab in Valparaiso. He has taught at the Architectural Association, the Berlage Institute, Cornell AAP, Columbia GSAPP, the UTFSM in Chile, and the University of Buenos Aires.

**FLORENCIA PITA** was the 2000 Fulbright-Fondo Nacional de Las Artes Grantee. She graduated with a Bachelor's degree from the Universidad Nacional de Rosario, School of Architecture, and a Master Degree from Columbia University MSAAD program. Pita is the principal of FPmod and is a Full Time Faculty at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-arc) in Los Angeles.

**ALEXIS ROCHAS** is the founder of I/O, a Los Angeles based practice focusing on the development of dynamic architectural methodologies integrating design, technology and advanced fabrication techniques. Rochas is a full-time Design Faculty at SCI\_Arc and Program Coordinator for Making and Meaning, SCI\_Arc's foundation program in Architecture.

**GALIA SOLOMONOFF** earned a Masters in Architecture from Columbia University in 1994. She is founder and principal of Solomonoff Architecture Studio, and has been internationally recognized for her work. Solomonoff is currently Associate Professor at Columbia University GSAPP.

**MAXI SPINA** is an Adjunct Professor at California College of the Arts since 2008. He was a Senior Designer at Studio Daniel Libeskind in New York from 2005-07, and taught at the National University of Rosario, Argentina and University of California at Berkeley, where he earned a Maybeck Fellowship in 2007-08.

**MARCELO SPINA** graduated from the National University of Rosario, Argentina and received his Master degree from Columbia University in NY. He is founder and co-principal of PATTERNS and Design and Applied Studies faculty at SCI\_Arc. He was Visiting Professor at

eral. This collective consciousness, I believe, is not exclusively *Argentinean*, nor does it belong to the realm of the so-called critical regionalisms—hardly an operative term—but it constitutes itself as the conviction, among a few architects, that architecture needs not to be grounded as a service profession, but rather as an instrument of our intellectual and cultural becoming.

**NAJLE:** The notion of what a collective is has changed together with us, so I would say yes, even if the process was not, and is not, commanded ideologically. There is certainly a common ground, and numerous connections between us have evolved over the years, including a tacit acknowledgement of our differences, which are played out in the various contexts wherein we operate. It is clear that the culture arising in the nineties at Columbia as well as the profound influence of computation in architecture over the last decade have influenced us all. And this is still present in the work, no matter how far we may have distanced ourselves from those sources. We were driven by cultural motivations at first and by the dynamics of the cultural market after. Our move was probably less ideological and more personal—or self-seeking—than that of the previous generation. We did not ‘leave’ Argentina as much as we were interested in expanding our intellectual and professional horizons. The fact that the previous generation succeeded in its migration served as a precedent: we followed paths that had already been proven to be possible.

**“Our move was probably less ideological and more personal—or self-seeking—than that of the previous generation.”**

—CIRO NAJLE

**DIAZ ALONSO:** Well, no, because that would sound like it’s been an orchestrated or choreographed effort, and I think this happened more as a happy accident. There are also different trajectories to be considered—myself and others come from Rosario, which had different sensibilities from what was happening in Buenos Aires. In any case, I’m always suspicious of collective efforts. I agree with Groucho Marx: “I don’t want to be part of a club that has somebody like me as a member.”

**PITA:** I think it’s hard to say because, for me, the main problem is cataloguing a generation. I think there’s a lot of chance in all of this. There are particular events that occurred, and somehow these created a chain reaction. I would say that for the group of us here, the model was “transitional” —Galia introduced a group of us to Columbia when she visited Rosario. Marcelo was then the first to attend, then Hernan, then I, then Juan, in sequence. That’s what I call the chain reaction. The grouping of Argentineans in LA happened through another university affili-

ation, in this case SCI\_Arc. Hernan started teaching, then came Marcelo, then I, then Alexis, Juan. It’s hard for me to pinpoint the relationship between us and previous generations because it has less to do with the recognition of a particular background, and more with a discovery of a new methodology.

**MARCELO SPINA:** Perhaps at a personal level because we share academic formative experiences and disciplinary environments. However, particular kinds of work from each individual begin to associate each of us with different people independent of their nationalities.

**HULJICH:** Yes, but in the sense that *collective* may mean being related to people from the same generation that have left the country at the same time and share many interests, not because a similar discourse might add to an understanding of our work. In a way I do consider ourselves influential in the new generation of practitioners, although I don’t consider the earlier generation as a direct point of departure. I think that has much to do with being on the West Coast. Many of the people you mention are on the East Coast and not necessarily related to Columbia, the closest relationship we built while being in New York for two years.

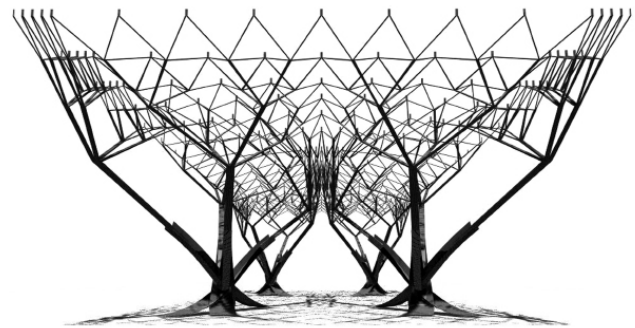
**SOLOMONOFF:** As I grow older, and as my influence deepens as a teacher, I have a stronger sense about an Argentine collective and I admire the efforts of everyone involved before and after me. I realize that there are traces in common yet not as strong as other collectives like the Madrid Club, for example. The sense of belonging to several communities has intensified, I am aware of the particularities of being an Argentinean woman practicing architecture in New York. Diana Agrest and Florencia Pita have helped establish the respect that comes before and after. In our office, SAS, we always have a young Argentinean architect, currently Ignacio Guisasola. I find that as a collective we combine theory and practicality, humor and horror with a unique ease!

**AZULAY:** I think we all feel that we are our own individual Diaspora, broader than Argentina. That’s the Argentine amnesia anyway. The closest thing to a nation we have is the possibility of our soccer team. However, looking back, you could begin to recognize cyclical diasporas. I think that for us, more than the references cited, it was Columbia or New York that served as the hinge point where these things came together and connections were forged. But it *is* strange that the patterns are convergent.

**MG:** *Would you be able to discuss your professional and intellectual development in relation to your cultural and/or academic/formal background? How do you see your education and upbringing in Argentina playing a role in your personal work?*

**HULJICH:** The education in Argentina is excellent. I believe we are very well prepared, and that this has played a very important role. We have a background that allowed us to learn new methodologies for making. It’s a type of background that allows you to be highly selective and not to just buy into anything that is presented to you.





Clockwise from top left: Rochas, Ibañez, Maxi Spina, and Najle

**MARCELO SPINA:** My education in Argentina was incredibly important since it gave me a kind of ethics and rigor that I never got in the United States as a student. The foundation of what we do as architects can be traced to my former education there. Since we are not only involved in speculative work, but also in building it, that formative experience is still very valuable.

**ROCHAS:** Absolutely. I'm the product of public education. I am from Buenos Aires and I went through an incredible, however traditional, free, public school system that has an incredible potential. It has its limitations over the course of time, and given my own curiosity, I tried to transcend those limitations by moving abroad and experiencing a second wave of education, so that's why I went through two undergraduate degrees—one in the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) and one at Cooper Union in New York. I think it took me five years to learn architecture, and it took me another five years to deconstruct it or pull it apart or undo what I knew what to do before.

**AZULAY:** I came to SCI\_Arc in 1993 as an undergraduate late transfer, so I was able to complete my basic architectural military camp at the University of Buenos Aires, with its very rigorous training and its mechanical time-management-based skills. I recognize I was very fortunate to have received a disciplined and rigorous training in my early education, and later, at

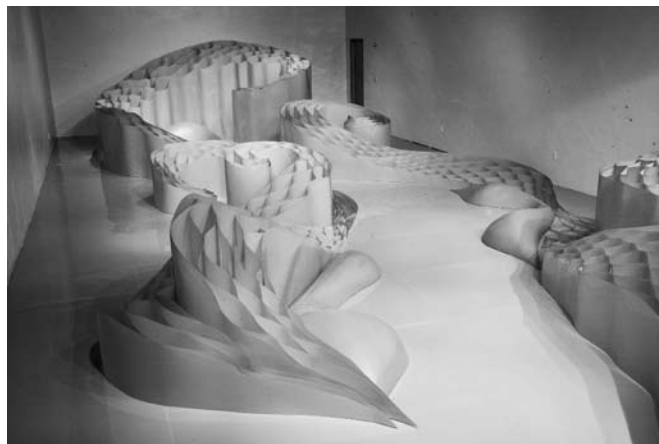
SCI\_Arc, I worked with people willing to take me to the edge of the cliff.

**MG:** *Are there any explicitly cultural-political moments in Argentine history that may have affected your understanding of your current environment/practice?*

**ROCHAS:** I grew up with a country trying to figure itself out after twenty years of dictatorship, so in a way, I see the country as experimenting ever since. There's no laboratory as big as Argentina, they keep experimenting today. It feels like a really *awake* country, they experiment economically, politically—some of the experiments fail, others transcend expectations, but the experimentation is continual. I always say that if the EU would work as an integrated utopia, it would very much look like Argentina.

**SOLOMONOFF:** I think, as an Argentinean—and as an immigrant—I am always ready for something to go wrong and to find a solution. I think we are conditioned, as kids of the *dictadura*, to understand double talk, to work hard, and to wait for gratification one day in some dreamed future.

**NAJLE:** I recognize the relative inconsistency of our background, and I consider it to be an intrinsic and deliberate cultural-political condition of our work, and not merely as a



Clockwise from top left: Diaz Alonso; Pita; Azulay; Solomonoff; Hultjich and Marcelo Spina



lack of position. We recognize that our speculations are developing in what one could understand as a mid-situation between the ironically paralyzing political activism of previous generations, and the underdeveloped criticality of those who have emerged since.

**IBAÑEZ:** The model where practice and academia are both an integral and indispensable part of architectural enquiry is one that I learned in Argentina and luckily managed to develop in

my experiences abroad. My education from various institutions in Buenos Aires was excellent, and I'm seeing many young architects in Latin America doing very interesting work. In the past, the distance from Buenos Aires to Europe and other cities of the world seemed to create a separation from contemporary discourse but the community is now more widespread and networked and characterized by local intensities.

**AZULAY:** Absolutely, I mean there's a hard wiring that we Argentineans have. Someone once said, Argentineans love their dictators. In a way, it means coming to terms with our own DNA. Growing up, we were dealt with an even weirder hand than our predecessor[s] who were thrown out of planes, drugged alive, made to disappear. Our death planes were imaginary creatures, where we didn't die, but were repeatedly thrown out. It's an intangible, invisible form of violence that festers like a void. Without knowing it, I believe we inherited that void, and then had to invent our own space.

**MG:** *How strong is your connection to Argentina and do you see your work and disciplinary interests having a resonance back home?*

**IBAÑEZ:** The research and work of my practice is multi-variant—we produce architecture that is classically recognizable as static form responding to site and programme, but we also interpret architecture as a changeable domain, with interactive and augmented response in service of new relationships among environments and occupants. The location of Cambridge is ideal for this research with its proximities to people of expertise in many disciplines. Argentina as yet does not have this specific interest although we see aspects of it emerging.

**HULJICH:** I think our practice has more resonance outside of Argentina than within the country. For us it has been, and still is, an amazing showroom. Being able to have three built projects is an opportunity that many people haven't had, and we're very grateful for it, but we've been more recognized for them outside of Argentina. People look at our buildings, maybe without saying much, but still appreciate what we do.

**DIAZ ALONSO:** Incredibly strong in personal terms since we have family living there, but that is pretty much it—professionally and intellectually I have zero interaction with Argentina.

**MG:** *You've been living abroad for about a decade—how much do you think the influences of the city have played a role in your work?*

**HULJICH:** In general, the dynamic nature of Los Angeles requires many years to grasp, and in a way, you need to build your own infrastructure. Once you do, you own it. I feel like I own the part of the city which I know. You have to customize it to your own interest. It means that you can follow your own ways. The horizon of opportunity is endless because there nothing is set.

**MARCELO SPINA:** Certainly the city has had a profound impact in who we are as architects. The entertainment, aeronautic and automotive industry, the technology available for material fabrication and the fearless spirit of innovation of Southern California is extremely important and attractive to us.

**PITA:** I always say I received my education in Rosario, my extended education in New York with Peter [Eisenman] and at Columbia, and then my double degree in LA working for Greg Lynn for five years. I think this experience really marked me, and I suppose that's the LA influence. I see it as "transferred influence." Greg was one of the precursors of having the architectural education engage with the fabrication industry that came from the movie industry.

**ROCHAS:** LA, I consider it a mirage. A mirage is something that flickers—sometimes it disappears, sometimes it manifests itself. Sometimes there are beautiful clouds of smog covering all of the mountains and there is no landscape... other days the wind blows and suddenly you discover a whole landscape buried behind.

**AZULAY:** I think Los Angeles offers more space and a better conflation of forces than anywhere else. I'm interested in the cultural imaginary in-between that lies within the territory of LA and its heterogeneous, non-linear, high-intensity, low-frequency environment, as well as the mediated moment that Hollywood might offer. In its fringes lies the furtive component so

compelling to the city. And ultimately, its materialization is behavioral rather than formal.

**DIAZ ALONSO:** Gigantic. I don't actually have any interest whatsoever in the material aspect of architecture. When we build we deal with that aspect but it's not something that interests me for investigation. I think it has to do with my ambition to keep everything in a kind of dynamic and cinematic logic. I will be the first to recognize that I'm much more obsessed with image than the physicality of form. So LA and I are made for each other. I like seeing the pictures more than seeing the object in reality. And nothing seems to be completely real here.

**NAJLE:** I would say that New York has had a strong influence in my aesthetic commitment to the brutal and the sublime, in my engagement with infrastructure, in my predilection towards wild and blunt material organizations, and in my preference for strong 'anti-detailing'. It has also helped me to develop a certain freedom, perhaps boldness, in relation to the appropriation of historical materials. London's influence is less object-driven and more about mind-set. I think its power lies in my attraction towards consistently elaborated forms of sophistication, in my attention to the excessively cultivated, and in the value I give to common sense: the beautifully constructed and strongly preserved sense of what has become 'common'. Both cities have also taught me a lot about ideological agility and trained my sensitivity towards the forecasting of cultural trends.

**IBAÑEZ:** London was a uniquely catalytic experience – it is from my graduate education at the AA and work with people like Cecil Balmond and Zaha Hadid that has established strong points of reference for me as an architect. Congruently, Cambridge is home to extremely powerful institutions with resources, facilities and people and our contact with them have fundamentally changed the way we practice. I am interested in defining polemical positions and imagining new environments as a result of the overlap between expertise that is considered architectural and expertise that produces architecture but comes from somewhere else. In this regard, both London and Cambridge have been instrumental.

**SOLOMONOFF:** Life is a journey and it makes more sense if you recognize where you started.

*Maria Guest, based in Cambridge, is co-Principal of Sharif Guest Studio, a collaborative design practice with Mohamed Sharif. Guest currently teaches at Rhode Island School of Design. Prior to teaching, Guest was Project Manager at Office dA, and from 2000 to 2006, Guest led the team for the US Courthouse in Eugene, Oregon, as Project Leader for Morphosis Architects in Santa Monica. Guest graduated from the GSAPP at Columbia University in 1996, where she was the recipient of the Outstanding Thesis Award, and the William Kinne Traveling Fellowship.*

**MORE ONLINE:** The complete text of the interviews can be found at: <http://www.drclas.harvard.edu/revistaonline>



# MAKING A DIFFERENCE



## Summer Camp in Las Terrenas, Dominican Republic

BY GABRIELA FARRELL

IT WAS 7 O'CLOCK ON A MONDAY morning and I was in a familiar place, the Dominican Republic. My mother is Dominican, and has made sure my brother Diego and I are able to fully immerse ourselves in the culture. Last year when I was 15 I decided that it was time to try to give back to the community. An opportunity arose in the form of volunteering at a small school in Las Terrenas, on the northeast coast of the DR. This school, called Los Niños de Meredith y Leonardo, caught my attention through my brother's elementary school, Lincoln School, in Winchester, MA. My brother's class had a penpal project with the children from Los

Niños and raised money for the school. I decided to investigate how I could help out. I contacted the school's administration and agreed to offer something familiar to children in the United States, but that these Dominican children had never experienced: a summer camp of activities that would help them keep excited about school over the summer.

Only seconds before I would arrive at the little school, in the center of town in Las Terrenas, the prospect of leading a group of kids, aged 7 to 12, suddenly seemed terrifying. My hands trembled as I approached with a bag filled with colored paper, scissors, markers, glitter and all of the

other ingredients for making introductory nametags. The school itself is tiny, the whole structure about the size of my Pre-Calculus classroom back home at Winchester High School. The kids greeted me with a loud "¡buenos días!" with smiles all around. My apprehension and nervousness dissipated. The boys and girls were excited to have a visitor, and had a keen sense of learning. Their teacher, China, was there the whole time prepping for the new school year and offered to assist me in any way necessary. As a volunteer, my job was to organize and give a one-week summer camp for the twelve children who were currently enrolled. I went

with a close friend of mine, Mimi, and we made a rough schedule of the week. Every day had a different theme. For example, one day the theme was music. Many times I had to improvise to keep the kids occupied. It was then that some vibrant personalities emerged. One boy, Cristian, was always dancing and was a true showman. One time we had them play along to some merengue music by Juan Luis Guerra with instruments we had made earlier in the day. Cristian took a ring with rubber bands, stood on the bench, and started performing for us. Another day I showed them all some basic ballet steps to expose them to a form of the



arts that they do not usually get to experience. One of the smallest girls, Leonelis, and her brother showed a great aptitude for dance. I went around the room adjusting their awkward stances, critiquing them on their first and second positions. The boys in the class, surprisingly enough, bore with it for the first fifteen minutes but when offered the option of drawing instead they glanced at me and then ran out of the room. I guess boys everywhere think ballet is girly!

My fondest memory from the one-week summer camp was the last day. We took a nature walk to look at insects and plants and birds. Three of the littlest girls picked flowers and gave them to me. Some of them held my hand. When we got to the beach I asked them who knew how to swim and was met with a resounding “Me me me!!!” The truth was that once we got in the water, anything more than

three feet of water was too much, and none of them actually knew how to swim at all (but it was great because they would go five feet away and try swimming over). All of the children come from difficult backgrounds, yet they are the most loving and uncomplaining kids I have ever met. I went to the school with the purpose of exposing them to art, music, literature and science, and the possibilities of additional study, and also to help them segue into the new school year. In reality, though, I received so much more acceptance and love from these children that I benefited by our time together as much as they did.

*Gabriela A. Farrell is a junior at Winchester High School. She can be reached at [Gabriela.farrell@gmail.com](mailto:Gabriela.farrell@gmail.com). For further information on the volunteer project, see <http://www.schoolforchildren.org/help.php>.*

## Insect Lessons

BY BRIAN FARRELL

### JUAN JOSÉ WAS THE FIRST TO SPOT THE KATYDID'S QUIVERING

antenna, then suddenly he made a quick grab and the green, squirming insect was his. One advantage to this tropical place is being surrounded by nature every day, year round. When one child grabbed at a bug quickly enough, the others would stretch out their hands for the catch—a dragonfly, grasshopper or beetle. Insects are certainly ubiquitous and approachable, like intricate little living machines that are also often attractive. In other words, ready subjects that can help young minds to develop and learn about life.

Once we agreed that insects were the little animals with three pairs of legs, the kids told me the Spanish names of many. Giant wasps (avispas), bumbling palm beetles (escarabajos), cicadas (cigarras), katydids, bees, ants, butterflies, dragonflies, all these they knew and many, many more. We studied some insects embedded in clear lucite blocks, like colorless versions of the amber familiar to Dominican



children. We talked about what we could see there, and looked at each specimen with a magnifying hand lens held close to our eyes. We also listened to and then imitated insect sounds—the chirps of crickets, the scrapings of a katydid and the whine of a cicada. Later, as we walked along the strand of palms and thick tangled vegetation that hugs the sandy road near the beach, the children spotted insects everywhere, under leaves, on branches, underfoot and in the air. They were very surprised to learn that one could study insects as a job, that the national university in Santo Domingo, the UASD, offers classes in insect biology, and that it has a large collection of insects. I left them with a poster we produced with the UASD of the butterflies and moths of Hispaniola, and definitely look forward to our reunion next year. Until then, we'll consider what we learned from our time last summer with the children of Las Terrenas.

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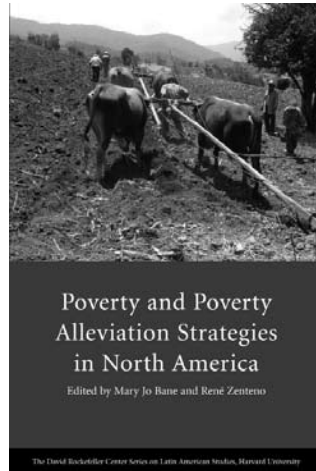
## Social Policy and Anti-Poverty Strategies

Comparative Viewpoints **A REVIEW BY MARTINA G. VIARENGO**

**Poverty and Poverty Alleviation Strategies in North America**, By Mary Jo Bane and René Zenteno (eds.), *David Rockefeller Center Series on Latin American Studies*, Harvard University Press, 2009

The eight essays in this volume, coedited by Mary Jo Bane, Thornton Bradshaw Professor of Public Policy and Management at the Harvard Kennedy School, and René Zenteno, Professor at the Graduate School of Public Administration and Public Policy at the Tecnológico de Monterrey, represent an important contribution to our knowledge of the social policies and anti-poverty strategies undertaken in North America. The co-edited volume is a collection of essays that were first presented at the conference Poverty and Poverty Reduction Strategies: Mexican and International Experience that took place in Monterrey, Mexico, in January 2005.

More than in the importance of the single contributions, the value of the volume lies in the successful attempt of providing an insightful analysis of social policies and specific poverty alleviation strategies by studying their development and outcomes in the United States and Mexico.



The book successfully combines the analysis of growth-enhancing policies, as well as human capital and specific social protection policies and how their inter-relationship can effectively reduce poverty. Lessons and policy implications are drawn for Mexico, the poorest and more unequal among the North American countries examined. The comparative approach is also valuable as it provides the background to understand the current situation and the controversy around some of the policies. The book should be in the required reading list of any course on public policy, poverty and inequality.

The volume is divided into four parts. The opening part provides the context and background of the book, offering a comprehensive overview of the evolution of

poverty in North America, as defined by different national and international sources, and how it varies along different dimensions, including geography, race/ethnicity and household composition in the United States, Mexico and with a more limited focus in Canada. Mexico appears to be the country where hard core poverty is more geographically concentrated, and also where market exposure and social modernization have not prevented extreme poverty from being related to indigenous status. The chapter underlines the importance of examining not only trends in growth but also in income distribution and how different concepts and approaches can be better suited to examine different aspects of poverty across countries.

The second section highlights the importance of development to fight poverty in Mexico, focusing on the channels through which growth affects the income of the poor, as well as on complementary institutional policies as a way of ensuring lasting poverty reduction, and finally on the adjustment to economic change of the low-income population.

Gonzalo Hernández and Miguel Székely examine how growth, economic stability and increased public spending have had an effect on

poverty reduction in the last half-century in Mexico. What emerges from their decomposition breakdown of GDP growth into the elements that may have an effect on poverty reduction demonstrates that improvements in labor productivity may play a critical role in fostering development and being an overall effective anti-poverty strategy. Specifically, they show how a combination of macroeconomic policies and social reforms can improve income at the low-end of the distribution.

Michael Walton's essay moves to the next level, by examining the policy mechanisms that can make macro policies effective in improving income distribution. That is, the author focuses on the distributional consequences of how institutions define "the rules of the game" (North 1990). Drawing on international experience, the main contribution of the paper is to highlight that the heterogeneity in outcomes of policies such as trade liberalization, financial liberalization, privatization, and in particular in outcomes related to poverty reduction, arises from the fact that the distributional consequences of growth policies are highly dependent on the existing distribution of power and the system of incentives that shape institutions. Therefore, the effectiveness of market-



related policies on poverty reduction needs to be guaranteed with complementary policies that introduce some kind of social accountability and external mechanisms of control.

The focus of the third essay of the second section is on the dynamics of the ability of the poor to cope with economic change. Mercedes González de la Rocha documents how changing labor market conditions in the 1990s and 2000s have increased risks and insecurity faced by the poor also by affecting their resourcefulness and their responses at the household level. That is, the increased insecurity concerning labor income, which represents the main source of income for the poor, has generated cumulative disadvantages by destabiliz-

ing the household's social organization and weakening social networks, with the overall effect of undermining their capability of coping with spreading risk and ultimately leading to social isolation.

term growth and development strategy. And again, in the 21st century global competition for the world's most valuable asset, human capital, Mexico lags behind its OECD counterparts.

In this regard, in a recent joint paper with my colleague Lant Pritchett, we confirm the lagging performance of Mexico in internationally comparable examinations. We also show how low average quality in international comparisons implies for Mexico that very few students are at global high quality and that by sorting students on household socio-economic status, not ability, Mexico is recruiting from a narrow base and producing a very small number of very highly skilled workers (Pritchett L. and M. Viarengo, 2009, "Producing Superstars for the Economic

Mundial: The Mexican Predicament with Quality of Education," chapter 2 in the "Mexico Competitiveness Report 2009" of the World Economic Forum, Ricardo Hausmann, Emilio Lozoya Austin and Irene Mia (eds.).

The chapter by Carlos Muñoz-Izquierdo and Guadalupe Villarreal-Guevara describes compensatory education programs and carefully examines the *Oportunidades* Program, first started

under the name *Progreso* in 1997, with the aim of providing low-income families with subsidies to encourage them to keep children in school. According to the authors, who provide an evaluation and also rely on the existing literature, it is difficult to separate the effect of the compensatory programs from the impact of the school input policies. However, the *Oportunidades* Program has had a positive effect on enrollments and attendance but so far it is not possible to see significant improvements in educational achievement, making the Program unsuccessful in attempting to improve the educational achievement gap.

In this regard, Richard Elmore reminds us of the importance of adopting comprehensive policies that take into account differences in the existing learning environments and the different incentives of agents who operate in the education system. Drawing on two U.S. case studies, on *Extend and Stale*, Elmore emphasizes the importance of considering the process of school improvement at the level of practice, mainly in three domains: the technical organization, as well as the policy and politics domains.

In the first of the two chapters devoted to the issue, Agustín Escobar Latapí focuses on the social-assistance side of the *Oportunidades* Program and on how it could further develop to become a social assistance program. The program design proposed relies on an extension of the eligibility for households that experience unanticipated in-

come losses and for the elderly: the introduction of incentive schemes to maximize the efficient use of the resources provided and minimize the dependence on them; as well as a complementary program of assistance and coordination between the agencies.

The origins and subsequent developments of President Lyndon Johnson's 1964 War on Poverty are examined in the last chapter by Sheldon and Sandra K. Danzinger. The authors examine the evolution of income-tested cash assistance programs by focusing on programs for families with children. They provide a very clear and effective analysis on how the focus of welfare reform targeted to the poor has shifted over time from increasing income of the non-working poor to providing resources for the low-income working parents.

The U.S. experience is then compared to other industrialized countries and reveals that the United States provides less support to the poor also as a result of the preference for "equal opportunity, not equal outcome" and the underlying system of reciprocal altruism which is different from the one existing in most European countries (Alesina et al. 2001).

Policy implications are drawn for Mexico and the possibility of introducing a non-contributory income-tested cash transfer for the elderly is considered to be feasible for the Mexican economy in order to develop a more comprehensive anti-poverty strategy.

In the conclusion to the volume, Mary Jo Bane and

## The volume's value is that it provides an insightful analysis of social policies and specific poverty alleviation strategies by studying cases in the U.S. and Mexico.

René Zenteno stress not only the importance of development for Mexico as the first strategy in the fight against poverty but they also recognize the essential role played by governance, the need for coordinating policies, and some of the possible consequences of migration and development, and of course the importance of focusing on other domains relevant to poverty alleviation.

Yet there is much more to be done, particularly in the areas of health, training programs and social infrastructure. The renewed sense of urgency for faster and deeper poverty reduction has led to a growing discourse on the determinants of poverty and the strategies for poverty alleviation in North America, and Mary Jo Bane and René Zenteno have paved the way to move the policy debate forward.

**Martina G. Viarengo** is an Economist at the London School of Economics and a Postdoctoral Fellow at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. For the past several years, Viarengo has been examining education policy and labor market outcomes in the OECD and developing countries, devoting her academic research to understanding how to improve access to quality education to reduce poverty and inequality.

# The Fight for Mexico

## A Post-mortem on the Country's 2006 Presidential Election

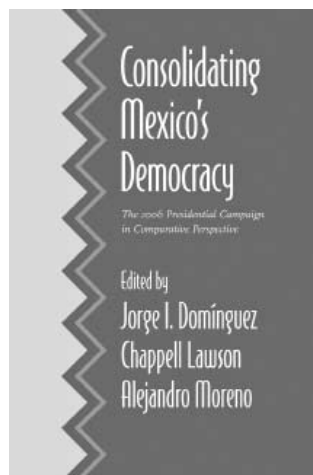
A REVIEW BY MONICA CAMPBELL

**Consolidating Mexico's Democracy: The 2006 Presidential Campaign in Comparative Perspective**, Edited by Jorge I. Domínguez, Chappell Lawson, Alejandro Moreno, *The Johns Hopkins University Press*, 366 pages

On Mexico's presidential election night, July 2, 2006, I stood with reporters in a brightly lit room in the Federal Electoral Institute, the sprawling nerve center located in Mexico City's outskirts. The large screens displaying early returns made one thing clear: a photo-finish ending was on between Felipe Calderón of the ruling and center-right National Action Party (PAN) and Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the left-leaning Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).

With a showdown imminent, I headed to Mexico City's immense central square. A crowd of pro-López Obrador supporters stood in the rain shouting, "We won! We won!" Others, inflamed that some tallies tilted Calderón's way, cried: "They're stealing the election!" Meanwhile, at a nearby hotel, Calderón fans began celebrating.

Soaking wet and knowing that a final tally might take days, I went home. Eventually, Calderón would seal his



win with fewer than 250,000 voters. López Obrador also claimed victory and waged a legal challenge, along with protest camps and press conferences alleging electoral fraud. In a truly surreal moment, López Obrador organized a large ceremony, donned a presidential sash and, presto, proclaimed himself Mexico's "legitimate president" (a title he still claims). Florida in 2000 looked tame.

Now arrives a welcome post-mortem. *Consolidating Mexico's Democracy* brings together veteran Mexican scholars to offer a micro-view of the 2006 election. In many senses, this book could only be written now, with the passing of the election's scandals, grandstanding and emotion.

The book spans a range of topics, from comparisons to the 2000 election and

Mexico's regional splits to independent voters and campaign tactics. For close followers of Mexico, many of the conclusions will not be surprising: wealth and partisanship largely explain Mexico's north-south, blue state-yellow state divide. López Obrador's overconfidence cost him dearly and, in general, Mexican voters are becoming more similar to those in the United States. The book's value is that conclusions are backed up by history and enriching nuance, along with data from a multi-wave voter survey conducted by *Reforma*, a leading Mexican newspaper. The book is also evergreen for those looking for clues to how voters and campaigns can play out in other new democracies.

In 2006, competition was tight to become Mexico's next president, but the battlefield had changed from 2000. Back then, voters largely supported Vicente Fox in order to end 71 years of corrupt presidential rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). In 2006, says Rodric Ai Camp, a professor at Claremont McKenna College, voters cared more about a candidate's ability to manage serious public issues of crime, immigration and, chiefly, the economy. Electoral democracy may have

arrived to Mexico, but some things had not changed: the ranks of the poor remained enormous. Voters wanted practical results and would punish any party that didn't deliver, says Camp.

It was also a three-way race, at least for a bit. Despite his scandalous, fraud-plagued past, PRI candidate Roberto Madrazo might have had a chance. The PRI had won local and state elections, kept key governorships and could position itself as a centrist choice, as Calderón and López Obrador polarized. Yet Joy Langston, professor at Mexico City's Center for Economic Research and Education, explains the importance of the PRI's primary process and how its messy divisiveness ultimately saw Madrazo "acquiring as many enemies inside the party as outside of it." Ultimately, the splits left Madrazo isolated with little hope of winning.

In contrast, the PAN saw Calderón as one of its own: a Harvard-educated conservative and former energy secretary whose father co-founded the PAN. Calderón counted on the PAN's elite and its ties to Mexico's campaign-contributing business moguls. A pro-market, devout Catholic, Calderón was a "rebel *with* a cause" and anxious to be a "loyal standard-bearer for his party," writes David Shirk of the University of San Diego.

Still, López Obrador was the frontrunner. As Mexico City mayor, he enjoyed massive popularity thanks to his ordinary man image: he arrived to work at dawn, lived in a simple apartment and drove a Nissan Tsuru. His call

to attack poverty and serve the underdog "have-nots" mostly attracted lower-income Mexicans, but also cut across class lines. He appeared bulletproof and able to escape rivals' attacks.

Yet cracks emerged. While López Obrador was favored, the PRD was not so. Fox was also still relatively popular and the economy was shoring up. And as the authors stress, nearly half of the voters they surveyed had yet to had to settle on a candidate mere months before the campaign.

Calderón closed in. He associated himself with the better economic times and, importantly, Fox's relatively successful welfare programs, including a cash-transfer program called Oportunidades that aims mostly at the urban poor and assisted nearly five million families at the time. This let Calderón curry a voter pool that might have firmly sided with López Obrador. Eventually, Calderón "owned the economic issue" and was seen as a capable manager, writes Alejandro Moreno, a professor at Mexico's Autonomous Technological Institute of Mexico.

Then came a series of negative televised ads targeting López Obrador. One likened him to Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, asking viewers: "Is this the type of authoritarian we want to elect?" In reality, López Obrador had never met Chávez. He intentionally "kept his distance from Chávez, fearing just this blowback effect," notes Kathleen Bruhn, a professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

The PRD complained to the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), correctly arguing that the spots violated electoral law stating that parties must avoid "any expression that implies diatribe, calumny, infamy, insult, or defamation." Yet the ads remained and Calderón's team noted their effectiveness. The IFE did not act until nearly a month after the PRD's complaint (and, still, the spots later reappeared). Questions remain about the IFE's passivity toward Calderón's campaign spots during such a tight race. Might the final outcome have changed if the IFE had pulled the ads immediately? It's a tricky moment to measure, and the book's contributors recognize the gap. But these questions still linger and deserve more attention.

Beyond that point, López Obrador became overconfident. He did not respond strongly to Calderón's charges of radicalism. Instead, he boycotted the first televised debate (a vacant chair was shown on screen) and insulted Fox, telling him to "stop squawking and shut up." "López Obrador," writes Bruhn, "would have benefited from sticking to his more moderate position, which was not so different from that of average citizens."

Meanwhile, more traditional voter breakdowns still counted. Both candidates leaned heavily on Mexico's classic regional splits, with more voters in the wealthier and industrialist north siding with Calderón and those in the poorer and more marginalized south picking López Obrador.

The authors also signal that Mexico in 2006 was more a U.S.-style election. "Images triumphed," observes Kenneth Greene, a professor at the University of Texas at Austin. That can be troubling. The polarizing positions that Calderón and López Obrador assumed did not necessarily reflect sentiments at the mass level, which leaned toward the center, the authors argue. The candidates were "badly out of step with the voters" and saddled them with mudslinging ads instead of issue analysis. And the candidates' perceived capabilities to solve pressing issues were not linked to clearly explained solutions.

Today, solutions to Mexico's urgent problems are hard to spot. Last year, the country's U.S.-dependent economy contracted, while gruesome drug cartel-related killings escalated. As a result, the PAN's image is suffering, while support for the PRD has dropped precipitously. Frustrated and mistrustful of the government, Mexicans voted in last year's mid-term election to double the number of seats in Congress held by the PRI, which is positing itself as the centrist option. Now, talk in Mexico is whether voters will back the old-guard PRI in the 2012 presidential elections and escape to the past.

*Monica Campbell is a 2009-2010 Nieman Fellow. She was a freelance journalist based in Mexico City from 2003 to 2008, publishing regularly in leading U.S. newspapers and magazines.*



# All About Almodóvar

MLA Manual Not Included **A REVIEW BY CHRIS VOGNAR**

## All About Almodóvar:

**A Passion for Cinema**, Bradley S. Epps and Despina Kakoudaki, eds. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2009, 488 pages

Pedro Almodóvar films, as any fan knows, are fastidiously designed and art-directed to the nth degree. They provide grist for mills aesthetic and ideological, emotional and intellectual, on themes that run the gamut from post-Franco Spanish politics to the travails of transsexual identity.

But here is the man himself, writing in his “Filmmaker’s Diary” on the making of *Volver*: “In this job, intuition is what rules.” The “Diary” is the last piece of writing in *All About Almodóvar: A Passion for Cinema*, a collection of very academic essays that demonstrates too little of the spirit or spontaneity by which its subject swears.

Take Linda Williams’ piece “Melancholy Melodrama,” in which the author, with a little help from her friend, describes a gun: “Rather, it functions much more like the phallus that Judith Butler argues is ‘no longer determined by the logical relation of mutual exclusion entailed by a heterosexist version of sexual difference in which men are said to ‘have’ and women to ‘be’ the phallus.’” Is there any possible context—or possible *language*—in which this tangle of words would qualify

as quality writing? Not all of the syntax is tortured in this anthology, and many of the ideas on display do justice to an artist who embraces the complexity of the human experience. But complex doesn’t have to mean obtuse, especially not when you’re dealing with a filmmaker who, for all of his theory-friendly qualities, is about as lively as they come.

He’s also a Rorschach test of sorts, viewable through whatever prism, and open to whatever interpretation, suits the particular theorist at hand. The book’s editors, Brad Epps and Despina Kakoudaki, know what kind of chameleon they’re dealing with. As they write in their refreshingly readable introduction, “in the last thirty years, Almodóvar has been, by turns, an experimental voice of the Spanish *Movida*, a social and political provocateur, a cultural iconoclast, and enfant terrible, a punk, a queer, and a quirky genius whose appeal transcends national boundaries and generic formulations.” For the past decade or so, beginning with *All About My Mother* in 1999 and running through last year’s *Broken Embraces*, Almodóvar has also become an almost mainstream international superstar: 2002’s sublime and haunting *Talk to Her*, one of the most frequently discussed films in this volume, broke the language

barrier to win an Oscar for best original screenplay.

But that’s the newer, less controversial (and less confrontational) Almodóvar. In previous incarnations he enjoyed a penchant for shocking even his target art film audience, often through unlikely combinations of sex, humor and violence. This is the subject of Peter William Evans’ essay “Acts of Violence in Almodóvar,” one of the stronger pieces in the book. Looking at films including *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984), *Matador* (1986), *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (1990), and *Live Flesh* (1997), Evans cannily points out “Almodóvar’s treatment of violence is not confined to a reflection of social patterns of abuse involving real-life violators and victims.” For Evans, interplay between dominance and submission in Almodóvar makes the filmmaker “a cinematic poet of fantasy—and of the pain and pleasure of sexual desire.”

As you may have guessed this is not a layman’s guide to Almodóvar, nor does it mean to be. Queer theory (even queer use of music, in Kathleen M. Vernon’s “Queer Sound: Musical Otherness in Three Films by Pedro Almodóvar”) gets a good workout, as do melodrama (aside from the Williams essay there’s Mark Allison’s “Mimesis and Diegesis: Almodóvar and the Limits of Melodrama”),



performance theory (Isolina Ballesteros’ “Performing Identities in the cinema of Pedro Almodóvar,” which bridges the gap between 1982’s *Labyrinth of Passion* and 2002’s *Talk to Her*) and a heaping dose of Freud. *All About Almodóvar* has theory coming out of its ears, some of it even explainable and relevant.

In other words it’s a book written by academics, for academics, unless you’re the type of person who likes to throw the word “cathexis” into casual conversation. This is all well and good I suppose; professors, after all, have a mandate to publish or perish, and it’s no secret that this generally means trying to out-MLA each other’s vocabulary. *All About Almodóvar* is like an echo chamber inhabited by very smart people who know very well how smart they are. One can imagine Almodóvar himself, Mr. Intuition, getting a chuckle out of the lengths gone here to explain his work before acknowledging that theorists must theorize, and tenure must be attained.

Still, the essays that work best in *All About Almodóvar* manage to convey complex and provocative ideas with-

out making the language weep like Marco in *Talk to Her*. Ironically, two of the most successful in this regard untangle Almodóvar's gleeful gender mash-ups and divide up the boys and the girls.

Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit's "Almodóvar's Girls" digs deep into narrative structure to look at, well, Almodóvar's girls as both characters and, more importantly, storytellers. The writers conduct a nifty dance between art and life and even manage to have some semantic fun with the title of "All About My Mother." Which brings us to Marsha Kinder's "All About the Brothers," a smooth cross-textual analysis of *Law of Desire* and the underrated *Bad Education* that even makes room for the *Godfather* trilogy and Kieslowski's *Three Colors*.

*All About Almodóvar* is a fine survey for the hardcore cinema studies student or insatiable Pedro fanatic with a dictionary at the ready. But don't pick it up looking for pleasure or for an introduction to the Almodóvar oeuvre. For that there's always Faber and Faber's *Almodóvar on Almodóvar*. Or, better yet, a repeat engagement with the films themselves.

**Chris Vognar**, *Movie Critic at the Dallas Morning News*, was the 2009 Arts and Culture Fellow at the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University. His favorite Almodóvar film is *Bad Education*, which he has found to be a rather unpopular choice.

## Lessons From Lizards

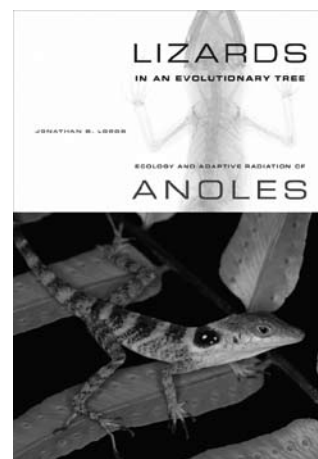
A REVIEW BY JAVIER A. RODRÍGUEZ-ROBLES

**Lizards in an Evolutionary Tree: Ecology and Adaptive Radiation of Anoles**, By Jonathan B. Losos, *Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2009, 507 pp.*

In the natural and social sciences, as in any other scholarly discipline, certain researchers become intimately associated with the study of particular topics. Think about Walter Álvarez and the impact theory that a comet or asteroid struck the Earth 65 million of years and caused the extinction of countless marine and terrestrial species, including the most famous organisms of all, the dinosaurs. Or about Jared Diamond and the rise and collapse of human societies; Thomas Eisner and the chemical ecology of insects; Harry W. Greene and Richard Shine and the biology of snakes; James Lovelock and the Gaia hypothesis that Earth is a living organism; and Ian Thornton and the post-eruption ecology of the Indonesian volcanic island of Krakatau. These researchers' books on their preferred subjects are eagerly anticipated—at least by some of us—and carefully read, not only because the tomes summarize a wealth of painstaking data and observations collected by the authors and their collaborators and colleagues, but also because the volumes almost invariably present novel and exciting insights, syntheses

and hypotheses.

Jonathan B. Losos has been studying lizards of the genus *Anolis* since 1982. He began working with these animals as an undergraduate student at Harvard University, and after spending 21 years catching and observing them throughout the West Indies and Central and South America while at three other prestigious institutions, has continued his investigations of *Anolis* back at Harvard since 2006, this time as Professor of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology and Curator in Herpetology at the Museum of Comparative Zoology. Since 1985, Losos has published 90 journal articles and book chapters (as of January 2010) that specifically address various aspects of the biology of *Anolis*. This integrative and influential body of work has made him the leading researcher on these largely small lizards, and in the process a world-renowned ecologist and evolutionary biologist. The publication of Losos' *Lizards in an Evolutionary Tree: Ecology and Adaptive Radiation of Anoles* was thus a noteworthy event, and those who were expecting an authoritative contribution will not be disappointed. (My goal in the following paragraphs is not to offer a detailed critique of the biological concepts discussed in the book—reviews published



in scientific journals will likely do that—but to provide a more general perspective for the readers of *ReVista*.)

*Anolis* lizards are the most conspicuous, abundant and diverse diurnal vertebrates inhabiting terrestrial ecosystems on islands of the West Indies. These characteristics make these reptiles ideal organisms to test and generate hypotheses about the ecology and evolution of biological communities. Indeed, anoles have figured prominently in investigations of several fundamental topics in the life sciences, including interspecific competition, adaptation, geographic differentiation, evolutionary diversification, the dynamics of the establishment of populations in new habitats, and the principles that govern the assemblage and organization of communities. Having played a major role in many of these findings, Losos is in an exceptional position to synthesize the lessons that we have learned from anoles.

The thesis of *Lizards in an Evolutionary Tree* is that interactions among species of *Anolis* significantly affect the ecology of these lizards,

and that these interactions are the main force that has driven and continues to affect the evolutionary dynamics of anoles. Two specific themes permeate the volume. First, that despite the remarkable diversity exhibited by the nearly 400 *Anolis* species, the same set of habitat specialists that share similarities in morphology, ecology and behavior (“ecomorphs”) *independently* evolved and co-occurs in communities throughout each of the four main islands of the Greater Antilles. Second, that this repeated evolution (convergence) of *entire communities* is the best documented case of this phenomenon. The strong emphasis on species from islands of the Caribbean Sea is a function of the voluminous number of studies on these West Indian animals, compared to their counterparts in Central and South America, where *Anolis* are conspicuously less common and much more difficult to observe. Losos’ lengthy and detailed—but not dogmatic—arguments in support of his contentions are persuasive.

The book is very well written. The arguments are precisely laid out and the paragraphs and sections flow and are logically arranged. Most of the nonessential information is relegated to 477 footnotes, a practice that enhances the cohesiveness of the text. In particular, the discussions of life history and population biology, social behavior and sexual selection, habitat use, and community ecology (Chapters 8–11) represent succinct and lucid syntheses of the available information.

*Lizards in an Evolution-*

*ary Tree* is an educational text. Although I am somewhat familiar with various aspects of anole biology, I benefited from reading the book. In a few instances, I even revised my lecture notes to use *Anolis* case studies to illustrate important biological concepts in my courses. Further, the chapters on phylogenetics and evolutionary inference, speciation and geographic differentiation, and evolution of an adaptive radiation are excellent examples of the interplay between theory and data. I would not be surprised if these chapters become recommended reading for graduate students and others interested in these topics, irrespective of whether or not they study anoles, for Losos’ presentation is a primer on the advantages and shortcomings of various analytical approaches, as well as on the importance of taking into consideration methodological limitations when phrasing research questions.

I appreciate the “honest writing” style that characterizes the book. We sometimes dismiss alternative perspectives without adequate consideration, or, through clever word choice, sidestep arguments that do not support our opinions, perhaps in part because of the understandable concern that discussing dissenting views may weaken our theses, and thus increase the likelihood that a journal or book editor will deem our work as too inconclusive and decline to publish it. Losos does not force the readers to accept his points of view. He states his favored interpretations of ecological and

evolutionary patterns and processes, but does not shy away from presenting lengthy contrasting explanations, providing the reader with the opportunity to determine whether or not she agrees with the author’s position. Losos also clearly indicates when he believes that the preponderance of the evidence supports his contentions and when his preferences represent his educated guess.

The extensive literature review conducted during the preparation of the book constitutes yet another strong point of the volume. The 74 pages of references list approximately 1,400 publications that include seminal, recent, comprehensive and little known works. This intimate familiarity with the literature allows Losos to assess the state of the current knowledge of the topics he addresses, to place them in an appropriate context, and to suggest promising avenues for future research.

Reviewers feel compelled to find fault with the works they are asked to assess, and I am no exception. Occasionally, the reader needs to be familiar with various technical terms to fully understand the arguments being developed (I had to look up a couple of terms myself). Other reservations involve aspects of the book’s design. The color scheme of some graphs actually decreases the effectiveness of the illustrations by making the patterns depicted by the data more difficult to distinguish. In several cases simpler, black and white figures would have been more effective. Further, graphs

sometimes have unnecessary features such as shading that do not enhance the information content of the figure, and therefore violate a basic principle of graphic design: to maximize the data/ink ratio. Additional criticisms include the lack of coordinates in all maps and the uneven quality of the photographs, which vary from exceptional to acceptable. Yet, none of these complaints constitutes a major distraction.

Approximately ten years ago, Losos remarked that he wanted to write a book about *Anolis*, but that he did not feel that he knew enough about these lizards to warrant such an effort at the time. Evidently, he eventually reached his self-defined knowledge threshold, and *Lizards in an Evolutionary Tree* is a scholarly treatise by a respected researcher who succeeded in his goal “to make this book the first place people look when they have a question about anoles.” Of broader significance, we can now become better acquainted with animals whose study has significantly increased our understanding of fundamental ecological and evolutionary principles.

**Javier A. Rodríguez-Robles** is an Associate Professor and the Associate Director of the School of Life Sciences, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where he teaches undergraduate and graduate biology courses and conducts research on the evolution, ecology, and behavior of squamate reptiles and of amphibians from the West Indies and southwestern North America.



# READER FORUM

Dear Readers,

Over the past twelve years June Carolyn Erlick and I have been collaborating on the publication now known as *ReVista*. Originally a 24-page newsletter, *DRCLAS News*, that in 2001 evolved into the substantive publication, *ReVista*, the Harvard Review of Latin America, sometime reaching 96 pages in length. Over the years design modifications have been made to address the editorial changes in the publication, bit by bit. We decided it was time to step back and look at the publication as a whole, in print and online.

This issue is the first of the look. The experience of reading the magazine was at the forefront of all our design decisions: from the size, to the page-by-page experience, down to the details in the typography. All of these decisions have been translated to a new website, [www.drclas.harvard.edu/revistaonline](http://www.drclas.harvard.edu/revistaonline), where you can comment on the issue and individual articles. We look forward to hearing from you.

KELLY McMURRAY  
CREATIVE DIRECTOR  
2COMMUNIQUE

Hola June.

Recibí la excelente revista de *Harvard Review of Latin America* que tú editas con tanta maestría y arte. MIL GRACIAS. Realmente formidable edición. Un trabajo portentoso que esta vez se dedica al Cine, uno de mis artes favoritos. La fotografía, el diseño, la calidad de los textos hacen de este número una pieza maestra para coleccionistas. Se suma a algunos tesoros (revistas) que



conservo y que releo frecuentemente con especial cariño. Mil gracias por esta joya que, con diccionario en mano, estoy leyendo sin perder detalle. Genial lo de Nelson Palacios, el realizador underground: qué manera más ingeniosa de hacer cine. Igualmente valiosa la historia de Santiago Álvarez y su experiencia en el cine cubano.

HÉCTOR ROSERO  
UNIVERSIDAD MARIANA  
FACULTAD DE PERIODISMO  
PASTO, COLOMBIA

Dear Mrs. Editor-in-Chief, I'm writing you from Berlin, Germany—from the former eastern part. This fact has some evidence because of the subject I'm writing you about: the *ReVista* "Film in Latin America".

In your editor's letter, you complained about the fact that not too many people were answering your question about some personal impressions on Latin American films.

So I'll try to tell you something about the Latin American films in my life. In former Eastern bloc coun-

tries, the choice of worldwide films was naturally not so complete, and I—as a "film freak"—missed a lot. But in spite of the censored choices, there were possibilities to get an impression of the world outside our little country—by watching movies (without the possibility to prove these impressions in reality).

My first associations in regards to your question were:

Sergei Eisenstein's *Que viva Mexico*, Luis Buñuel's *Los olvidados*, Santiago Álvarez' *Now!*, Marcel Camus' *Orfeo negro ...* As you see, some of the movies were not really Latin American, but in my head they built some kind of picture ...

In the 60s, I studied in Leipzig, and every year (till now!!) there is an important documentary film festival. In GDR times it was a possibility for us to see some half-legal things, to talk with filmmakers and culture experts from abroad. I remember my very strong impression of *Now!*, 5 minutes long, as I remember, full of power. And in 1968 or 1969 there was shown another film by Álvarez, concerning the Prague invasion in August '68. This invasion was a shock for us, and to criticize it was impossible, a taboo. As far as I remember in Álvarez' movie there was only a speech by Fidel Castro, criticizing the invasion...

Luis Buñuel's movies—most of them shown in GDR-arthouse cinemas—gave me a basic "feeling" of Spanish and the Spanish-speaking world; that way they got in my head—very unprecisely—

also as "Latin American."

Another part of "Latin America in my head" was *Missing*, the Costa-Gavras film about Chile, and also Werner Herzog's wonderful movies *Aguirre oder der Zorn Gottes* and *Fitzcarraldo*, both made in Latin America.

It's important to mention a very special thing: the East German filmmaker Rainer Simon presented 1988/89, before the wall broke down, a film *Climbing the Chimborazo* about Humboldt's expedition. This was a really important film, a kind of projection of actual problems into the past: the wish to discover the world ...a part of this kind of conversation inside the strong GDR borders, speaking about present problems through a historical story.

To come from the past to the present: in the past years I had very strong impressions by the new—real Latin American—movies such as *Babel*, *La teta asustada* (last years' winner of Berlinale), *El laberinto del fauno*. So I'm really looking forward to new films by Guillermo del Toro and Alejandro González Iñárritu.

A very special thanks for this issue of *ReVista*!

ELFI GRIMM,  
BERLIN, GERMANY

## FE ERRATA

The Film issue of *ReVista* in September 2009, was erroneously listed in the masthead as Volume 8, number 3. It is actually Volume 9, number 1.