

DISPLACEMENT AND THE MAKING OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE – A SOUTH-SOUTH PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

*Displacement has been a central element in shaping Modern Architecture. This line of argument is particularly significant when looking at the case of Latin America. Suffering long periods of political instabilities, regime repressiveness, intellectual censorship, ruination of public institutions and social inequality, many Latin American countries have faced critical challenges that profoundly affected the ways in which history of modern architecture was made and re-made. In fact, there is an ample scholarship that has linked migration with the modern movement in Latin America. Although great efforts have been made to bring to light biographies of émigré architects who left Europe and contributed to shape modern architecture in the Americas -and therefore stressing both "North-North" and "North-South" perspectives- very little work has looked at this issue through a "South-South" dialogue. My point of departure of this proposed paper is a UNESCO call for experts to discuss the architectural and urban problems in Latin America. The assembly taken place in Buenos Aires in 1969 resulted in a seminal publication, whose English edition entitled *Latin America in Its Architecture* appeared twelve years later, this being a time when many countries of the Southern Cone of the Americas were governed under military regimes. While dealing with important topics such as the crisis of the professional and academic identity, the search for significance of tradition and the relevance of social participation in architecture, this pioneering collective work becomes one of the most influential books on Latin America in the international architectural debates of the postwar era. What makes this book unique is that it has been almost entirely produced by émigré architects such as CIAM member Max Cetto (based in Mexico), as well as architectural historians such as UIA member Roberto Segre (based in Cuba and later Brazil). Instead of memories of displacement and experiences elsewhere, the publication discusses the roots, traditions and meaning of Latin American architecture with a perspective to the future. It seems then inevitable to ask not only how this network of intellectuals that produced the book was created, but also and mostly how their experiences of "displacement" and "home" affected their discourse. The present proposal examines this collective discourse on Latin American architecture of the twentieth century by not only dealing with a North-South perspective, but also from a 'South-South' movement. It does not aim at mapping a network of émigré architects. Rather, it uses this collective work as a critical case to reflect upon the ambiguity, as well as ephemerality, of the meaning displacement in the process of making architectural history in Latin America in the postwar era. It focuses on displacement and network as central arguments and analysis tools. It challenges the very core of the traditional narratives on CIAM on the one hand; it enlarges the complex social context and network in which the CIAM debates were produced and reproduced on the other hand.*

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