

ARCHITECTURE, DESIGN, AND PLANNING:
Recent Scholarship on Modernity and
Public Spaces in Latin America

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- AMÉRICA LATINA FIN DE MILENIO: RAÍCES Y PERSPECTIVAS DE SU ARQUITECTURA.* By Roberto Segre. (Havana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1999. Pp. 329. \$8.00 paper.)
- BLUE LAKES AND SILVER CITIES: THE COLONIAL ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE OF WEST MEXICO.* By Richard D. Perry. (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Espadaña Press, 1997. Pp. 279. \$25.00 paper.)
- BUILDING THE NEW WORLD: STUDIES IN THE MODERN ARCHITECTURE OF LATIN AMERICA, 1930–1960.* By Valerie Fraser. (New York and London: Verso, 2000. Pp. 280. \$65.00 cloth, \$23.00 paper.)
- FROM AZTEC TO HIGH TECH: ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE ACROSS THE MEXICO–UNITED STATES BORDER.* By Lawrence A. Herzog. (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. Pp. 241. \$55.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper.)
- LATIN AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE: SIX VOICES.* Edited by Malcomb Quantrill. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, Center for the Advancement for the Studies in Architecture [CASA], 2000. Pp. 219. \$60.00 cloth.)
- ON THE PLAZA: THE POLITICS OF PUBLIC SPACE AND CULTURE.* By Setha M. Low. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. Pp. 274. \$18.95 paper.)
- REVOLUTION OF FORMS: CUBA'S FORGOTTEN ART SCHOOLS.* By John A. Loomis. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999. Pp. 432. \$27.50 paper.)
- PERFILES LATINOAMERICANOS.* By FLACSO (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales). (Mexico City: FLACSO Sede Mexico, 10, no. 19. Special issue titled "La nueva segregación urbana," 2001. Pp. 234. \$20.00 paper.)
- THE HAVANA GUIDE: MODERN ARCHITECTURE, 1925–1965.* By Eduardo L. Rodríguez. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000. Pp. 263. \$24.95 paper.)

THROUGH THE KALEIDOSCOPE: THE EXPERIENCE OF MODERNITY IN LATIN AMERICA. Edited by Vivian Schelling. (New York and London: Verso, 2000. Pp. 312. \$60.00 cloth, \$22.00 paper.)

The *fin de siècle* and “bridge to the new millennium” metaphors swept through the humanities, arts, and social sciences in the late 1990s and generated a spate of research that reassessed prevailing epistemologies. Nowhere was this taking stock of paradigms more blatant than in assessments of modernity, and its theoretical cousin, postmodernism. Studies of the built environment provide an excellent venue to trace the confluences of these ideas because architecture, design, and planning reflect the interplay of history, politics, and the social construction of public spaces. These processes manifested themselves clearly in Latin America, the most urban realm of the so-called Third World.

This review essay samples a small selection of the many works that document the interface of architecture, design, planning, and cultural studies in Latin America. Divided into four major sections, I begin with a review of some of the dominant themes espoused by these ten books. The second section assails a selected interpretation of the colonial past. Next, I turn to how most of these works conceptualize modernity and what changes students and scholars alike might contemplate in the early twenty-first century about how modernity manifested itself in the built environment and selected aspects of Latin American culture and literature. I conclude with some tentative remarks about the trajectory of design, architecture, and modernity for Latin America’s built environments.

DOMINANT THEMES

The modern movement in Latin American architecture portended and delivered great projects by the middle of the last century. It promised new mass housing, high-rise buildings on stilts (*pilotis*), and motorway flyovers (mostly along the ideas espoused by the French-Swiss architect, modernist, and visionary extraordinaire Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, better known as Le Corbusier). Modernity in the building trades meant substituting the dense brick of the nineteenth century with the open box and geometrical configuration of the twentieth. New architecture in twentieth century Latin America called for rational forms to embody the spirit of this new image; decoration and ornamentation would become a relic of the “backward” past. Indeed, the term “architecture” would supplant “building” and some new populist leaders across the political spectrum were eager to adopt the tenets of the modern movement because such codes represented progress, order, and a strong nation state. Concrete’s plasticity, versatility, and relative low cost afforded Latin America a chance to continue forging new

designs (made largely out of steel, glass, and reinforced concrete) that could keep pace with a rapidly urbanizing region. While most of the tenets of the modern movement originated in Europe, the preindustrial streets and neighborhoods of the Old World could not be razed easily for historical and aesthetic reasons; cultural heritage (*patrimonio*) has long been a badge of distinction in Europe, unlike its American cousins. In Latin America, industry had made only a modest dent in the urban fabric and new building styles could easily etch out space for new, brazen designs in the early twentieth century.

Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico spearheaded much of that work with the construction of new cities (Brasilia), *ciudades universitarias*, industrial and housing complexes, and showcase public, commercial, and residential sites. Oscar Niemeyer's pavilion for the 1939 World's Fair captured the emerging, minimalist vision of architecture—a hallmark of the modern movement—and showed that Latin America was capable of forming its own patterns of design that departed from the North Atlantic nations. As Valerie Fraser points out in *Building the New World: Studies in the Modern Architecture of Latin America, 1930–1960*, few Latin American nations could mass-produce the iron, steel, glass, and prefabricated concrete panels needed to support modern architecture (7–8). Housing, work, recreation, and traffic could be (normatively, at least) organized under new town planning, directed by architects (planning as a distinct profession would come later). In 1953, the New York Museum of Modern Art presented a special exhibit, *Brazil Builds*, which underscored the new currents of design afoot in one corner of the Americas. Henry Hitchcock's widely read *Latin American Architecture* (1955) also registered the evolution of that design trajectory.

International journals such as *The Architectural Review* and the *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* paid special attention to developments in Latin American architecture. Le Corbusier's early visits to Argentina and Brazil in 1929, along with later visits to Colombia, launched Latin America's engagement in the modern movement. As many of these books reviewed here make plain, Latin America was not a *tabula rasa* for simply importing Beaux Arts, Art Deco, eclecticism, brutalism, and other European aesthetics. Latin America's built environments reflect the tenets of regionalism, *hispanidad*, indigenous styles, and other forces. Modernity, as envisioned by the Latin American "maestros" of the Modern Movement, would humanize the built environment instead of alienating it as in parts of New York, Chicago, London, and Western Europe.

PRESERVING AND INTERPRETING THE COLONIAL PAST

To understand how this process unfolded, we begin this review with Richard D. Perry's *Blue Lakes and Silver Cities*. This book, like Eduardo

Luis Rodríguez's book on Havana, takes a conventional route in describing colonial arts and architecture. Perry limits his review to colonial architecture and arts in an area west of the Valley of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean, consisting of the lake states of Michoacán, Querétaro, Guanajuato, and Jalisco. His is a beautifully illustrated travel guide with over two hundred pen-and-ink sketches. It emphasizes Spanish colonial heritage including sixteenth-century missions, altarpieces, carved façades, baroque churches, and monasteries. Each Mexican state receives its own separate treatment, preceded by a brief but succinct seven-page introduction that outlines the religious, political, and the artisan forces that molded sixteenth-century colonial architecture. Perry's audience appears to be the intelligent reader and serious traveler who might include this handsomely illustrated book along with the travel guide to Mexico. His impetus for writing the text and penning the illustrations stemmed from being "dismayed by the lack of material on the subject for English-speaking readers" (272). This book would serve as a fine supplemental text for the curious traveler or an undergraduate study-abroad course.

MODERNITY, ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING

Eduardo Luis Rodríguez's *The Havana Guide: Modern Architecture, 1925–1965* continues the regional focus of these books but shifts his time frame to the modern movement in Havana around mid-twentieth century. Handsomely illustrated maps and building-specific photographs grace the volume. There are brief descriptions of residential and commercial buildings throughout the work. The author's introduction is short but provides a competent overview of the republic's attempt to shake off the under-investment in the building trades during the nineteenth-century independence wars, and forge a modern cityscape in the twentieth century. Like many architectural historians, Rodríguez traces the design roots that came to Cuba from Europe and the United States and, when applicable, *lo cubano* surfaces. Havana's modern architecture is unique (Cuban) when adapting forms of Catalanian Modernism (Art Nouveau) and Art Deco that compare favorably with the best examples from Barcelona and Miami Beach. Like Perry's tome on colonial western Mexico, this fine book is both an "any-visitor's guide" to the Cuban capital, and a welcome contribution that moves beyond the coffee-table genre books in a post-Buena Vista Social Club era of Cuban Studies.

Malcolm Quantrill's *Latin American Architecture: Six Voices* is the fifth publication in a series titled *Studies in Architecture and Culture* at the Texas A&M University Press that Quantrill edits. The book's main contribution is to move beyond the classic masterpieces of Latin American

architecture and to highlight exceptional architects from the late twentieth century (many of whom are still practicing). The discussion of the architects' works was commissioned from critics in each country concerned. Each chapter is handsomely illustrated in black-and-white photographs. Attempting to show a "continental identity," the editor selects profiles from local architects who have built in six countries: Argentina (Clorindo Testa), Colombia (Rogelio Salmons), Chile (Christian De Groot), Mexico (Ricardo Legorreta), Uruguay (Eladio Dieste), and Venezuela (Jesús Tenreiro-Degwitz), thereby capturing the "six voices" of the subtitle. While one might quibble with the exclusion of Brazilian examples despite the use of "Latin American" in the title, and the obvious exclusion of female designers, this is a mostly worthy collection of site plans, brief essays, and photographs.

Kenneth Frampton writes in the preface that the authors in this book follow an *otra arquitectura*, akin to Frampton's own Critical Regionalism. He also notes that the modern movement never attained many of its ambitious goals: "the scale of the housing shortage in Latin America is of such dimensions as to put it beyond the scope of the building industry, let alone the architectural profession" (xii). Next, the late Argentine architect and critic Marina Waisman introduces the volume, noting that Latin American architecture adopted its own lines of development, style, space, and structure. The "symptoms of modernity" (5) included new urban models, new building techniques, and new architectural types, but in Latin America, they were "superficial reflections of the transformations suffered by European societies . . . Any trace of Spanish or colonial origin was rejected, as a reminder of a past of shame and backwardness" (5). Whether some republican examples melted into local versions of the California style, avant-garde Creole, or other variants, clearly the ideas of Le Corbusier quickly moved to erase the past. "Old historic centers have become marginal while the new major cities have expanded outward" (12), attributable in good measure to the uncritical adoption of the International Style. In Havana, Mexico City, and Buenos Aires the Beaux Arts traditions supplanted the Spanish Colonial past. Modernity made its inroads in public, civic, and institutional architecture after World War II, while private housing was more *avantgardiste*. Universities and other intellectual centers embraced modernity much earlier than most government institutions. However, the examples that comprise this volume are, as Waisman notes, "a breath of fresh air."

Quantrill's *Latin American Architecture: Six Voices* lacks a summary chapter that brings these interesting but loose threads into a single weave. Instead, readers will have to use text and illustrations to forge their own conclusions. While some architects and designers may appreciate the separation of the photo credits and descriptions useful and

less cluttering visually (credits list at the end), this reviewer found it disconcerting to shift back and forth. Some photographs (e.g., p. 50) are juxtaposed with text that is not tied to the architect under review. Moreover, it is hard to believe that there is no bibliography included, a perennial critique when social scientists view the written works of many architects. Nor is there a selection of Brazilian architecture, an oversight not missed by Kenneth Frampton (ix) in his preface.

Valerie Fraser remedies many of these shortcomings, in part based on her vantage point as a reader in the University of Essex, Department of Art History and Theory and the Centre for Latin American Studies. Admittedly a different book than Quantrill's, *Building the New World: Studies in the Modern Architecture of Latin America, 1930–1960* is a comprehensive and accessible work that could reconfigure the thinking among many English-only readers and how they view Latin American architecture. Fraser tells us that in the 1940s, Latin American architects were advancing fast in the areas of public housing, urban design and renewal, and engineering techniques in ways that most U.S. architects had not fathomed. Though errors were made, Fraser attempts to unravel the many political, pedagogical, economic and social forces that generated a distinctive Latin American modern architecture. The void she aims to fill stems from intellectual snobbery and U.S. neglect: when historian and critic Sigfried Giedion concluded in a 1958 graduate seminar at Harvard that Brasilia's plans were unsatisfactory and required the help of Le Corbusier, "Brasilia, along with the rest of Latin American modern architecture, more or less disappeared from the English-speaking world's views of the achievements of the twentieth century" (3).

Fraser's introductory chapter is the best-written synopsis of Latin America's modern movement that I have read. It is well referenced, insightful, and will please a range of readers: architects, planners, geographers, art historians, and social scientists. Readers will immediately see the web-like connections spun among urban designers, social scientists, artists, intellectuals, and political movements that crisscrossed the Atlantic last century. Like Rodríguez's book on Havana, she too is concerned with the acme of the modern movement in decades just before and after World War II. Just four chapters comprise this easy-to-hold and handsomely illustrated book of drawings and black-and-white and color photographs.

The final chapter, titled "From Rejection to Oblivion," brings in scattered examples from the Americas and serves as a summary. Fraser argues that by the late 1960s, the notion of modern architecture had been stolen from Latin America and Europe by the United States. Brasilia was used to epitomize the shortcomings of the movement.

Latin American modernist architecture, having been dismissed as puerile, exotic, irrelevant or simply wrong, then simply disappeared off the map of archi-

tectural history altogether. If we are to restore it to its rightful place, we need to try out some different adjectives. How about, for starters: innovative, shocking, exciting, diverse, challenging, brave, witty, adventurous? (255).

The discourses shaping Latin American modernity stem from many places. Latin American critics also lent a hand—rightly or wrongly—in dismissing some fine modern structures. The example of the Cuban School of Arts located on the former golf links of Havana's western suburbs is insightful. The art complex was never fully completed and was poorly maintained (as discussed in the book by John Loomis). Its buildings serve as a wonderful display of local (Cuban) designs, native building materials, and tropical sensuality, regardless of whether they were built during socialist or capitalist times. However, the ideological tides in socialist Cuba in the mid-1960s changed. Fraser (249) writes:

The drama school, on the other hand, is a compact, piled-up design, like a cubist drawing of an Italian hill-top town. The architecture throughout is designed to delight, with the constant interplay of open and closed volumes, light and shade, architecture and vegetation. . . . As Cuba moved closer to the Soviet Union, the schools came to be repudiated first by architects and critics, especially the influential Roberto Segre, and then by the government: they were extravagant; they made use of outmoded materials and methods of construction; the vaulting system was unsafe; and in their explicitly programmatic architecture they presented a pre-Revolutionary image of Cuba as sensual and indulgent, an amoral tropical paradise. By 1975 non-Cubans were joining the attack: the Mexican architectural critic López Rangel argued, echoing Segre, that "the works contain a meaning incoherent with the values of the Revolution."

This is a telling example of how the image of the modern movement was critiqued rigorously from within, but in the Cuban arts schools, we find all the same ideological trappings used to critique the most abject modern shopping malls and consumption palaces spawned by western capitalism and constructed by the modern movement.

If Frazer's contention that the power of language is important in shaping the conditions of public discourse about public spaces, then Vivian Schelling's edited work, *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America*, bestows insight about framing public issues and the philosophical debates about modernity. Eleven chapters by mainly social scientists from Latin America comprise the four parts of this book. Schelling introduces the work. Part 1, "Predicaments of a Peripheral Modernity," connects with a theme in Fraser's book: who is the proprietor of modern architecture's manifestations—tangible and otherwise—and how does Latin American manifest modernity in its thinking, writing, and material culture? Néstor García's essay on globalization and modernity in Latin America is a particularly refreshing piece because it casts the region as an active shaper of its own destiny, with suitable caveats, of course.

Part 2 addresses modernity in the city. Nicolau Sevcenko examines the role of peregrinations in Brazil and highlights the permeability of urban and rural spaces in the modern age. Beatriz Sarlo showcases Buenos Aires as a “peripheral” metropolis because of its high percentage of foreign immigrants (“strangers”) and the city’s dogmatic history of Peronist populism that was squashed by bureaucratic-authoritarian dictum from the 1960s until the early 1980s.

Using José de Alencar’s classic work, *O Guarani*, Ortiz aims to show the challenges that writers such as Alencar faced when trying to transplant European Romanticism to Latin American soil. Ortiz argues that the only way to transfer (western) civilization into the realm of nature is to distinguish between the good savage (an idealized version created by the writer) and the reality of savagery (exemplified by Brazilian society at large). This ideal type necessarily created conflict and simplified the complexity of a nation emerging from an agrarian to an industrial society, and parallels the very essence of how modern architecture manifested itself from across the Atlantic and into the cities and towns of Latin America.

Ana M. López discusses early cinema and modernity, emphasizing the tensions in Latin American cinema between objectivity at the one hand, and display and spectacle, on the other. The early cinema in the region helped to construct national narratives and promote “nationness” under conditions that meant difficult compromises among politicians, film producers, and artistic expression. López notes that most early Latin American filmmakers were first-generation immigrants. “The cinema was thus not only a medium of mobility but also of great appeal to the mobile: to immigrants seeking to make their fortunes in the new world through the apparatuses of modernity” (163).

In chapter 7, Gwen Kirkpatrick traces the effect of the *vanguardista* writers from the 1920s and 1930s whose use of surrealism and other movements “gained a strong foothold from Paris to New York and Havana to Buenos Aires” (177). This is a fascinating account of artistic movements from Harlem, Parisian *négritude*, and a variety of musical and literary genres that pushed the rules of order and aesthetics to new limits.

Beatriz Resende studies Brazilian modernism in chapter 8 and adds to the review of Latin America’s contribution to notions of modernity. Her selection of examples is riveting yet banal; for instance, she describes Mário de Andrade’s account of two paintings in a church in São Paulo where local, tropical fruits are included:

The detailed engraving of watermelon opposite Christ, in the Last Supper, is a raw touch of delicious ingeniousness. One cannot help smiling when faced with this cornucopian national table. The copier must have been Brazilian, or perhaps Portuguese with an intimate acquaintance with our national exuberance. (213)

Displays like this “low” cultural exuberance demonstrate how Latin America reinserts itself into western culture through non-elitist, “high” culture ways on a steady basis.

The final section of Schelling’s volume is titled “Modernity in Politics, Ideology, and Religion.” Two of the three pieces are set in Brazil, which indeed is overly represented in a volume that includes ‘Latin America’ in its title. Of special note is Nelson Manrique’s examination of alternative development in the Andes. He takes no prisoners in understanding why “imported” development models have failed. Neither the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) school (spearheaded by Raúl Prebisch), Marxists, developmentalists who conceptualized the proverbial “gap” between rich and poor and nations, the technocrats of the Southern Cone, nor the agrarian reformers got it right. The Indianist movement argues for a right to be different and the possibility of constructing social and political orders that are inherently more democratic and humane than the foreign models imposed during the twentieth century.

Schelling’s volume is highly recommended even though it would benefit greatly from a concluding chapter, and is overly reliant on Brazilian examples. It is accessible across disciplines, thoroughly indexed, and is well translated. It truly provides the cross-disciplinary thinking that Latin Americanists need to make sense out of the “kaleidoscope” spun by modernity.

Roberto Segre’s *América Latina fin de milenio: raíces y perspectivas de su arquitectura* also assesses the condition of modernity in the twentieth century. Like Valerie Fraser’s work, Segre aims to assess the path etched out by Latin American architecture. His approach, though, is less conciliatory. He takes aim at the conventional interpretations of architectural criticism right at the start, blaming:

el llamado *jet set* de la crítica hegemónica en la región: nos referimos a Ramón Gutiérrez, Marina Waisman, Jorge Glusberg, Enrique Brown, Silvia Aragno, Louise Noelle de Mereles y Cristián Cox. . . . que para nosotros constituía el punto de partida de una visión renovada, objetiva y realista en la búsqueda de una articulación científica entre la esencia y los fenómenos caracterizadores de nuestro entorno construido, para un integrante del grupo de críticos “idealistas” este análisis llevaba a la “muerte de la arquitectura” o a la negación de los atributos de su “especificidad” objetual. (12–13)

Cosmopolitan and vernacular approaches to the built form impose rigid categories, and approaching architectural criticism with preconceived categories poses challenges and opportunities, according to Segre. Ever progressive in his approach, the author defines his turf clearly:

Descartar los valores progresistas y positivos de las nuevas formas y espacios generados por urbanistas y arquitectos, es la responsabilidad fundamental del

crítico. Esclarecer los caminos que se abren hacia el siglo XXI, ha sido el objetivo de estas reflexiones. (16)

To achieve this goal, Segre organizes this book along ten chapters, which reaches full stride in chapter 6, "*Asimilación y continuidad del movimiento moderno.*" Using an outline-format found in many Latin American texts, Segre approaches the modern movement by highlighting the artistic vanguard, European migration to the region, the use of style by the local bourgeoisie, state aid, labor and raw materials, and the commercialization of design. He draws on the Mexican and Southern Cone experiences to show the influence of these forces on Latin American architecture. This masterfully written chapter shows how Latin American regional design and environmental architecture articulated its own voice.

The book ends with a brief chapter on public housing and a review of revitalizing the historic district (with a brief though dated summary) of Habana Vieja. The epilogue serves in some way as a conclusion, and Segre adverts to a central premise about what axioms should drive architecture and design in the Americas: Can the region afford a frivolous preoccupation with monumental pieces for the (political or economic) elite while millions remained marginalized in the towns and cities? With real-estate speculation, imported models of design, and unfettered capitalism and neoliberalism, the answer is decidedly "no." Architects must, according to Segre, be protagonists and work within a dialectical setting, anchored between technical decision-making and community participation (311). Using local and low-energy materials such as clay and bamboo—evident in works from Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, and Cuba—will also provide a new economic base for Latin American architecture to articulate the special voice it so justly deserves.

América Latina fin de milenio: raíces y perspectivas de su arquitectura has already been published in Portuguese but there is no English-language version in print. The book would benefit greatly from an index and an updating. Nonetheless, it is well endowed with scores of black-and-white photographs, designs, and sketches. It will serve as a benchmark for interpreting many facets of twentieth-century architecture in Latin America.

The Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO)-Mexico devoted eight articles and an introductory piece in number 19 of its journal, *Perfiles latinoamericanos* to emerging themes in urban segregation. Angela Giglia introduces the essays of this special issue, and notes that closed residential spaces increasingly characterize megacities, especially around the Mexican capital. Manuel Castell's *The Information Age* and Richard Sennett's *The Fall of the Public Man* provide much of the non-Mexican conceptual material for this special issue. However, there is a decided Latin American twist: Giglia quotes Michea in

characterizing the Latin American dilemma, one that is intricately tied to notions of modernity and postmodernity:

la curiosa obligación moderna de producir al mismo tiempo siempre más espacio urbano (centros, periferias, tecnópolis, y muchas otras maravillas que los expertos no dejarán de inventar) y cada vez menos ciudad, en el sentido que esta palabra había conservado hasta los tiempos en que había constituido un magnífico sinónimo de libertad. (7)

The Latin American city has bifurcated: a dizzying public space filled with pedestrians, street vendors, informal retailers, hustlers, and passersby in the city core that contrast with highly protected and gated neighborhoods, entertainment and dining centers, malls, and sporting venues beyond the *centro histórico*. This new segregation, however, is self-imposed (*autosegregación*) and is increasingly defined by security guards, fortress-like architecture equipped with walls and sentry lookouts, and surveillance cameras watching public spaces. Readers will immediately recognize an analogous theme that resonates throughout Mike Davis's description of multicultural and multi-fragmented Los Angeles in his decade-old work, *City of Quartz* (widely available in Spanish and Portuguese). But, as California goes, so goes the rest of the Americas?

Martha Schteingart commences the issue with a review of the prevailing paradigms about urban segregation. She argues that no single explanatory framework can adequately account for the condition of Latin American cities, especially Mexican cities, and she rejects facile terms such as the "globalized" or "neoliberal" city because those processes have just begun to leave their mark on the Latin American metropolis.

Marie-France Prévôt Schapira reflects upon the realities and concepts that shape social and spatial fragmentation in Buenos Aires in her paper titled "Fragmentación espacial y social: conceptos y realidades." The brutal impoverishment of the city's middle class has aggravated residential segregation. Private neighborhoods are increasingly redrawing their boundaries and strengthening their borders in defensive postures, loathsome to see local tax bases drift to areas beyond their jurisdictions, and creating a mentality of "them" versus "us." If the federalization of Buenos Aires in the 1880s cast the state as an integrating force, Argentina under the Menem policies of the 1990s shifted 180 degrees. One of three *porteños* is impoverished, which is why it makes little sense to talk about *villas miserias* or *conventillos* concentrated in or near La Boca or Barracas. This essay makes a strong conceptual and empirical contribution to Latin American urban geography and city planning.

The third article in this special issue, authored by García Sánchez and Villá, turns north, to Caracas, Venezuela (a fuller version can be found at <http://www.flacso.edu.mx/Publicaciones/Revista,número19>). The authors assess the concepts of "urban violence" and "personal insecurity" through an in-depth study of Caracas neighborhoods called

alcabalas. These are not just tax districts but also form protective zones used by the metropolitan police, municipal police, and the National Guard. These spaces are increasingly covered with concrete posts to keep vehicular traffic out, three-meter high walls, and a variety of fence types. Illegally, there is also a rise in “toll chargers” (*cobradores de peaje*) who extract fees from pedestrians and drivers for passage into certain neighborhoods (even when they have proper identification or can prove their business in a particular part of town). Caracas before the 1980s was a liberator—kind, rich, modern, festive, mestiza, and full of beautiful women—but has become chaotic, disorganized, and segregated.

Monica B. Lacarrieu and Guy Thuillier switch the geographic focus back to Buenos Aires in their paper on open and closed cities, and public and private spaces. They use thick descriptive accounts based on personal testimonies to convey city life in Buenos Aires. Theirs is a fruitful merger between an anthropologist and an urban geographer. They interpret what Buenos Aires once promised, and what it turned out to be. Insecurity, crime, segregation, and a host of maladies consume the thinking of many *porteños*. Like Mike Davis’s tongue-in-cheek reference to issuing passports to facilitate travel across Los Angeles, and like the previous article describing crime and vigilantism in Caracas, Lacarrieu and Thuillier portray a dismal scene where insecurity is pervasive.

Two conceptual and normative pieces about urban design, planning, and public spaces conclude this special issue of *Perfiles latinoamericanos* on urban segregation. Jordi Borja and Ziado Muxí contend that urban centers are polysemic places, which they define like the traditional notion of multiple-nuclei or multi-nodal functions. Beyond the traditional *centro histórico*, urban planners need to develop multiple centers for creating diversity, vitality, and mixed land uses. Their pleas for infilling, reconverting brown sites, recycling old buildings, and single-use zoning are certainly not new in urban design and planning. Public administrators must ultimately take charge of projects and plans that will guarantee a multi-nodal city that is democratic and aesthetically attractive; the role of the local state cannot be abdicated to the market even though “el gobierno local es el más indicado para definir y programar los espacios públicos” (127). Likely to be fiscally challenged, inter-governmental cooperation is essential (e.g., local, municipal, metropolitan, provincial, and national) to ensure that vital central functions and public spaces receive the attention they deserve.

Jérôme Monnet continues the discussion of public spaces in his comparative analysis of Los Angeles and Mexico City. While in both metropolitan areas the supermarket may be the only place where groups of mixed incomes and ethnicities mingle, that market-driven activity is one aspect of the “village green.” Monnet lists racial and ethnic categories used to classify residents in Spanish America. He suggests that the

Spanish American city has always been segregated. Centrality and public spaces are different between Mexico City and Los Angeles in obvious ways, but the systemic forces of conditioning the symbolic meanings inherent in those spaces are historical and institutional:

¿Cómo se construye lo público en una aglomeración marcada por el éxito de un cierto proyecto segregativo, a la inversa de lo que pasó en la ciudad de México? Mientras la sociedad urbana mexicana a fin de cuentas puede presentarse como una pirámide jerárquica, pero relativamente integrada gracias a las lógicas de solidaridad de divesas naturalezas. . . . el proyecto colonial angloamericano logró separar y desolidarizar las poblaciones y las naturalizó de modo perdurable en categorías etnoraciales, cuya traza estadística es guardada por los diferentes censos. . . . Durante tres siglos y hasta los años sesenta, el apartheid fue legal en Estados Unidos y continúa siendo socialmente operante en nuestros días. El proyecto del *melting pot*, del crisol donde se fundan las indentidades anteriores para forjar un “hombre nuevo”, no ha implicado ni legal ni legítimamente más que a los inmigrantes europeos, a los cuales las autoridades estadounidenses han podido difuminar sus orígenes nacionales para adoptar una identidad nueva y común. (140)

Unlike Mexico City, Los Angeles has no central place designed for all social actors. Therefore, the terms of the debate over public space have changed: “Hoy este debate se concibe en terminos de pluriculturalismo o de multiethnicidad, porque la sociedad urbana mira sus lugares comunes como reveladores de su propia diversidad, y no de su homogeneidad” (148).

Taken in its entirety, this special issue provides useful comparative perspectives on how issues of security, class, community participation, crime, and local planning divide the Latin American city, and the way in which those discussions are packaged. Despite the problems identified in Caracas, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, and Mexico City, public spaces are not as rare and undemocratic as they are in Los Angeles.

Few works on public spaces and plazas are as detailed, longitudinal, and multidisciplinary as urban anthropologist Setha M. Low’s *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture*. Building on nearly three decades of observation of public spaces—largely in San José, Costa Rica—the author shows how the physical form of the plaza encodes the economic, social, and political relations within the city. Using personal field notes (chapter 1), a historical review of the plaza’s evolution in Latin America (chapter 2), the histories of selected plazas (chapters 3, 4, and 5), ethnographies (chapters 6 through 8), and conversations and novels (chapters 9 through 11), Low documents

a personal journey to uncover the cultural and political significance of public space by focusing on the design and meaning of the plaza in a contemporary Latin American city. . . . [and] a search for the architectural origins of the Spanish American plaza and the ethnohistorical meanings embedded in its urban location and spatial form. (xiii)

Her methodological approach to achieve this goal is appropriately broad, making Low the best interdisciplinary Latin American urban research this reviewer has read in years. The characters of her San José Parque Central drama are prostitutes, students, pimps, retired men, girl watchers, widows, school kids, shoe-shine men, and others—the hubris and bulwarks of the Spanish American plaza. Her review of the European, indigenous, Latin American, and Costa Rican plaza is the best written and most comprehensive and accessible account I have seen. Her lucid writing style is complemented by tables, sixteen (movement and behavioral) maps and plans of plazas, and photographs (fifty, including three of the author's over a span of several decades conducting field work in Costa Rica). Her chapter on "Public Space and Protest" adds to a much-neglected field of inquiry and will speak to Latin Americanists with an interest in gender, literature, architecture, design, and planning. She shows how regular people can reclaim portions of the public realm even though those victories are tiny, symbolic, and possibly short-lived.

In *From Aztec to High Tech: Architecture and Landscape Across the Mexico–United States Border*, Lawrence A. Herzog also claims that North Americans could learn much from their Latin American neighborhoods—especially in Mexico and along the northern international border. While late-night television comedians may poke fun at landscape and architecture, Herzog shows that there are common features along both sides of the border despite the homogenizing forces of globalization and the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA).

If the spirit of place is lagging in America, one way to recapture it is by redirecting America's attention to the cultural diversity of its cities and regions. Here, on the Mexico–U.S. border, places like Tucson, San Antonio, El Paso, Albuquerque, Santa Fe, San Diego, and Los Angeles possess rich cultural heritages. . . . The borderlands, therefore, offer an opportunity to use landscape diversity—contrast—as a way of exciting interest in the daily experience of place. (x)

Herzog excites this interest in seven well crafted chapters. His introduction examines the historical, design, and architectural roots of the transcultural city. The borderlands do not constitute a fixed border, but a broad milieu where give-and-take has persisted for centuries. Using "Aztec" in the title of chapter 2 and the subtitle of the book as a reference to Mexico's colonial and indigenous past, he turns his attention to the defining roots of Mexico's architectural and urban design. Chapters 3 and 4 review Mexican architecture and landscapes in southern California and along the long border. Chapter 5 enlists "high tech" as a symbol for North American design; much of it banal in quality but ever visible and widespread. Elements of caricature exist throughout Mexico that bring with it tackiness on which global tourism thrives. Herzog's

portrayal of an almost Mexican Disneyland designed largely as a museum—Mexitlán—highlights the parody of crass cross-cultural borrowings that stem from globalization and embedded in Mexican tourism. “Here in Mexitlán, there will be monuments from all over Mexico, combined with movement, light, and music,” notes one tourist brochure (161). This complex at the edge of downtown Tijuana is not unlike Disneyesque venues in Spain, Denmark, Netherlands, and Taiwan. Mexitlán, though, is different: “[It] is a meeting of the First and Third Worlds,” remarked chief architect Ramírez Vázquez (163). By 1992, the amusement park/cultural showcase was closing early because of low attendance. Designed to attract Anglos as well as Mexican Americans in the largest Mexican border tourist city, consumer surveys revealed that once inside, the tourists were very satisfied. However, most tourists do not set out for the Mexican border to visit museums.

Herzog describes how the Americanization of the Tijuana plaza “threaten[s] to turn Tijuana into Anywhere, Mexico/U.S.A” (165). Like Monnet’s piece from the *Perfiles latinoamericanos* volume, Herzog contrasts the traditional Mexican *zócalo* with its U.S. counterpart: the shopping mall:

The loss of traditional spaces is being lamented in cities worldwide but it is particularly noteworthy in the borderlands. . . . Both the erosion of cultural landscapes as a result of tourism development and the privatization of vital public space are examples of the potentially destructive effects of NAFTA on Mexico’s built environment.” (176)

Chapter 6 echoes themes from Malcolm Quantrill’s edited volume discussed above: the voice of architects. In this case, Herzog includes perspectives from Mexican architects on how they truly view a Mexican landscape. The chapter draws on examples of postmodern condominiums, Las Vegas-like designs of nightclubs, the infamous border fence, and the panoply of people and cityscapes that form the borderlands. While color, innovation and spontaneity reign supreme south of the border, homogeneity, technology, and order prevail to the north (199).

From Aztec to High Tech concludes with yet another comparative observation, this time by Guillermo Gómez Peña: “Cities like Tijuana and Los Angeles, once socio-urban aberrations, are becoming models of a new hybrid culture, full of uncertainty and vitality” (202). Herzog reasserts his main argument: border cities represent the future city, the transcultural city. “A new Mex-American landscape is being produced in an environment where Mexican people, whether U.S. citizens, immigrants, or Mexican nationals, are leaving their imprint on the cultural landscape.” The author creatively captures the tension between memory and futurism, between old and new, and ponders what the twenty-first century will be.

Lastly, John A. Loomis's masterful book, *Revolution of Forms: Cuba's Forgotten Art Schools*, anchors this review essay because it is a powerful work that links the importance of specifying geographic scale that tether ideology, architectural training, local context, and global economy. After an excellent foreword by Cuban art critic, Gerardo Mosquera, the book tells the story of the discourse surrounding the evolution of these celebrated art schools. It begins with Fidel and Che playing golf in January 1961 on the golf courses of Biltmore, a western suburb (today Cubanacán). The men agree to turn the golf course, maybe the most flagrant symbol of bourgeois leisure, into a free arts school for aspiring Cuban and Third World students. Work commenced until the mid-1960s on the five schools, each with its lead architect. Cuban-born Ricardo Porro was tasked with the schools of Modern Dance and Plastic Arts, while Italian architects Roberto Gottardi took on the Dramatic Arts school and Vittorio Garatti headed the design and construction of the School of Music and School of Ballet. Yet, the politics of the island, a tightening U.S. embargo, and a rising Cold War left the projects incomplete. Brilliantly vaulted Catalan domes and most of the materials came from local clay pits at a time when the fossil-fuel inputs into concrete were expensive. The schools aimed to provide a functional expression for the artists (dancers, painters, musicians, sculptors, and potters) and to reflect a type of national identity, or *cubanidad*. The ensembles of winding, sensuous, and clay-colored domes and vaulted ceilings sprawled over the former golf course, but, regrettably, were never fully completed. As discussed in Fraser's book above, criticism from within the island's political and architectural community began casting the school as hastily and poorly constructed frivolity, something a "serious" Cuban revolution could never allow. Soviet ossification would smother the spark of a truly beautiful modern structure, and it would take decades to redress the damage inflicted.

Encroaching vegetation and vandalism damaged the buildings. Flooding and poor drainage threatened the integrity of the structures. Even the simplest of maintenance was denied although thousands of students from the island and elsewhere studied at the different faculties. By the late 1990s, the schools had the dubious distinction of finding their way on the list of the 100 most endangered structures as compiled by the World Monuments Fund (<http://www.wmf.org/a/watchlist.htm>). Loomis' wonderful work ends before full-fledged intervention began. Restoration efforts in the millions of dollars now come from the Cuban government. Fortunately, the three architects—now in their 70s—returned to Cuba to meet collectively for the first time in thirty-five years (one never left the island); most recently, they chaired a session at the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture meetings in Havana (June 2002).

BETWEEN MEMORY AND MODERNITY

These scholarly works highlight how Latin American common folk and its intelligentsia have accommodated global economies and local culture while carving out a niche of their own. The region's architecture has advanced beyond the showcase public buildings of the mid-twentieth century, and modest yet distinctive forms of regional architecture are everywhere. New forms of design celebrate local history, artistic tradition, and local building materials in small yet significant ways. Even though Latin American architectural critics have been overly caustic on their colleagues' works, and showcase pieces like Brasilia have mistakenly been used to disparage all modern architecture, the designers of public spaces and buildings in Latin America have not adopted these models blindly. Also, Latin American fiction and cinema reflect the ways in which public discourses about the *patria*, modernity, and the nation-state are framed, disseminated, and debated.

Hybrid ways of building, living in, and using public spaces will always be fraught with tensions, as these publications show. However, it would be premature to conclude that the quality of design, planning, and the contestation of public spaces are doomed in some predetermined, mechanistic way. We can only hope that the "militarization" of public spaces and commercial and residential design that prevail in world cities such as New York and Los Angeles are not harbingers for the rest of the Americas. Rather, both Latin America and the industrial North Atlantic nations have profited from the ways Latin America has forged its 'modern' identity. Latin America's path in the new millennium is marked with signposts that signal the pitfalls and accomplishments of modernity.