

Theory and Strategies on Historiography: Investigation and Teaching

ELIANA CÁRDENAS

Instituto Superior Politécnico José Antonio Echevarría

The central objective of these reflections is to analyze some aspects related with theories and historiography strategies, that have been present in the Latin American context of the last decades. They also analyze the paper that should assume the historical investigation and the teaching of the history of the architecture and the urbanism in the complex current context. Some phenomena of the international environment are included. These phenomena have influenced in the transformation of the traditional focuses of the architectural and urban historiography. It stops later, to evaluate what it has happened in Latin America and Cuba, and to specify a strategy in function of the investigations that should be carried out in the Cuban case and how it will rebound in the teaching for the formation of the future architects.

CONTRADICTIONS IN THE PAPER OF THE HISTORY

Some years ago Fukuyama decreed the end of the history and the current society is really characterized by to only focus the present. In this vision, according to Jencks, the "homo sapiens" became the "homo cyborgs".¹ That is to say, it has lost their history, being subjected to the technological devices created by him same. Contradictorily, the intents of preserving the historical memory of the society persist. An evidence is the "Letter of Krakow 2000" – updating the 1964 Venice Charter –, which incorporates the concepts of identity, authenticity and a new idea on the safeguarding of culturally diverse neglected patrimonies. Inside this current panorama it interests to evaluate some phenomena that have rebounded in the academic ambience of Latin America.

The diverse tendencies in the architectural design of the last times oscillate between the not very critical assimilation of the past and their rejection. On the other hand, in the urbanism, the global plans are rejected and priority has been given to the

urban projects for specific sectors that can be carried out in less time. Other positions have granted relevance to the sociology, to the semiotic, to the environmental preexistences and auxiliary branches and complex conceptions. In all they can meet a correspondence with the theories and historiography strategies that have dominated the panorama of the investigation and teaching in urbanism and architecture.

The decade of the sixty it was marked by the "methodological fever" promoted fundamentally by the Englishmen, but extended to other academic environments. Soon after, the application of the semiotic studies to the design and the architectural analysis (for example: Echo, Dorfles, Bonta),² they rescue the value of the analogy and, therefore, of the typological, association locating the history in an outstanding place, see from a critical angle but centered in the topic of the formal expression. Jointly, the significance of the technology like essential factor in the design process, condition the appearance of new theories. For example, the ideas of Banham, who it exercises notable influence in the English universities and in other places, given their vocation of itinerant professor and their books with provocative ideas.³

The turn to the historical-typological analysis was an example of valuation of the past.⁴ The postmodernism used this analysis in the project methods and it was the conceptual base of the process of the rehabilitation of the Italian historical centers in the seventy. In recent stages, the importance of the environmental preexistences, the contextualism, the idea of architecture and urban space as place, they face the present ruptures in the deconstructivism and other recent tendencies,⁵ in which the history is denied – at least seemingly –, while that rupture impression reaches to the surrounding context.

THE HISTORY OF THE ARCHITECTURE LIKE CRITIC OF THE IDEOLOGY AND THE SOCIOLOGICAL FOCUSES

The years seventy brought changes in the investigation and teaching of the history of the architecture and the urbanism. The critics are increased to the modern project, already begun from the previous decade. Not alone for the ideas that ended in the postmodernism (Venturi),⁶ or the ascendancy of the place concept (Norberg-Schulz, Muntañola, Lynch),⁷ but also to refute the universality of the architecture concept and the amplification of its "territory" (Gregotti) or their terminological plurality (Alexander).⁸

It is important to evaluate the debate that takes place during that decade in the University Institute of Architecture of Venice, when it was one of the most outstanding centers in investigation and diffusion of the history of the architecture and the city and of reference in the international environment. We cannot forget the idea of Tafuri about the incompatibility between the historical-critical work and the architectural project and, therefore, the doubt about the scientific value of the "operative history" that served from support to the project.⁹

The historical analysis changed the study object: of the architectural and urban works to the architectural ideologies and the processes that sustained the tendencies and works. This had double implication: on one hand, to defend the autonomy of the historical investigation and of other, a new vision supported in a Marxist focus, that which could seem contradictory given the heuristic paper of the history that defends this doctrine and, therefore, to deny their possible operational function.

In fact, it was to look for the foundation of the urban and architectural transformations beyond the apparent results, with different focuses in the investigation and teaching of the theory and history of the architecture in connection with a more social perspective and critic. In this way they are renewed concepts and they feel the bases of a historiography with more critical sense, with the employment of categories that could reveal the underlying ideological objectives in the architecture and the city.

Nicos Hadjinicolaou in its book *History of the art and fight of classes*, presents an analysis of the ideologies related with the Venetian one. Manuel López leans on in the approaches of Hadjinicolaou to analyze the architecture in the context of Latin America.¹⁰ He is integrated in this way to the sociological focus of the history, already appreciated from the decade of the seventy, fundamentally in Roberto Segre and Rafael López Rangel.¹¹ It is a focus with a remarkable transcendency in the region that derived in some cases in an attitude that questions the traditional history, and to grant bigger importance to matters like the sociology, the urban geography, the economy

and other similar ones that were good as auxiliary instruments for the historical investigation.

At the end of the decade of the sixty several investigators they thought that an unavoidable task was the search of analysis instruments and of an apparatus of appropriate categories to evaluate the historical processes of the architecture and city of the region. It was important to evidence the understanding of the differences of the Latin American world the one in connection with the metropolitan centers of where the models came to guide the practical activity and to approve their application. The International Seminar "Situation of the Historiography of the Latin American Architecture", promoted in 1967 by Graziano Gasparini, then director of the Center of Historical and Aesthetic Investigations of the Faculty of Architecture and the Urbanism of the Central University of Caracas, were a landmark in this field, when putting in discussion conceptions, definitions, critical categories, classifications coming from the European historiography and their direct adjournment to the Latin American reality.

Although this seminar analyzes the problem essentially from the point of view of the historiography, for the necessity of specifying the cultural differences between Latin America and the metropolitan centers, it was the germ of an inquiry movement about our roots with innovative focuses, increasing the knowledge on the prehispanic and colonial stages. But they are also important the studies that were carried out later on about the influence of the modernity and the transformations that she induces, of analysis of the factors of identity, effort to which investigators sink and educational younger to those already consecrated. On the other hand Marina Waisman, outlines, starting from the topic of the historiography, a group of instruments for the analysis peculiar of the architecture in Latin America.¹² It is the moment in that the take off of a true historiography and Latin American critic whose foundations find spaces for the debate in the Seminars of Latin American Architecture begins and in several regional forums.

Several anthologies show becoming about Latin American architectural and urban thought, as the prepared ones for Segre, Ramón Gutiérrez, Harday, Manuel Castells, López Rangel, Antonio Plays, Silvia Arango, Enrique Brown, Carlos Véjar and others. The own texts of these authors are also published and of other, history professors or theory of the architecture or of the urbanism.

Also in the Cuban context it is appreciated – in eighty ninety – a growth of the historical investigations, inside a mark of perception of the values of the past, in which the temporary and geographical spectrum of the studies has been enlarged, with the incorporation of young historians.¹³

That increment of the investigations and their critical focus, will rebound in the teaching of the history, mainly starting from

ends of the seventy, and at the same time it contributes to the reflection about the topic of the expression of the cultural identity in the architecture and the Latin American city. These ideas lean on in the appropriation and reelaboration of the models, in an agreement transgression with the contingencies of the context,¹⁴ where the complex derived processes of the social, political and cultural, equally complex factors, they have a remarkable weight.

In this topic of the identity they will be added other theories like that of the critical regionalism.¹⁵ However, it can be affirmed that are synthesized somehow in many of the works that have constituted significant contributions to the knowledge of the architectural and urban evolution in the region, – and with different grades, of course – the sociological and cultural focus in the precision of the own phenomena. The historiography's strategies are defined for the search of relationships among the external influences – impossible to obviate in our cultures characterized by even active processes of transculturation and miscegenation – and the socioeconomic, political, cultural phenomena, which condition the assimilation and reelaboration of those influences to arrive to results that they oscillate between the mimetic thing and the appropriation. But always, the expressions of more validity are the able ones of integrating in the language of the moment the requirements of the physical and social context.

The significant historical investigations of the last times have gone opening roads of agreement understanding with the problems of the own context and all those concerns continue effective. Our cultures are always open to new influences, which impels to continue revising the historiography concepts and to overcome the traditional notion of architecture, to assume the current problems in the conformation of the built environment and the existent contradictions among globalization and sustainability, market interests and necessities of built spaces for the population, architecture like marketing or elitist, and identity and social participation.

They are still lagoons to cover in the knowledge of the architectural and urban evolution in general and of stages and specific geographical spaces. In a same way, it lacks in the professional formation the fair appreciation of our history like factor that it contributes to a practice of more coherence from the point of view of the own architectural culture. Especially, this is vital to face some current problems of the architecture and in general of the atmosphere built in Cuba.

STRATEGIES ON HISTORIOGRAPHY

The topic of the operational function of the history should be discussed in connection with the strategies on historiography. Without doubts, the historical investigation should have auton-

omy as for revealing the knowledge of the historical processes, but it is also certain the importance of its heuristic character.

Particularly in the teaching process, it has been proven that the history of the architecture and the urbanism doesn't only constitute a discipline of general cultural preparation, but rather it has a non despicable function in the development of an attitude and vision critics, and in the capacity to think, provided it is based on analytic focuses through which put on of relief the processes of continuity and rupture in the built atmosphere and the possibility of reading of the results of the design actions from diverse points of view.

The Discipline Theory and History of the Architecture and the Urbanism, when declaring their fundamental objectives, define "... the function of guide of the theory and the heuristic function and axiological of the history, in the architectural and urban environment, with the purpose of endowing the student with methods and instruments for the analysis, and of a cultural base that contributes to the integral foundation of their creative practical activity and to reach a critical position before the atmosphere in general, assuming in their true dimension the own cultural values."

Among other objectives it outlines "... that the students develop: the capacity to think and to evaluate critically, a humanistic culture that enlarges their vision the world and that it helps to evaluate the economic, sociocultural and ecological consequences of the urban and architectural solutions; a conscience of cultural ownership and they can insert the national and international experiences critically, from advanced technologies until the traditional ones, inside a sustentabilidad concept that validates the agreement solutions with the circumstances of the social and physical context."

Also it is sought that the history knowledge cooperate to the development of an own cultural expression and of a conscience of preservation of the architectural and urban heritage, like one in the identification ways with the native values, as well as the sensibility toward the population's problems and toward the necessity of achieving an aesthetic quality in all architecture type and urban space. It should agree with the sociocultural expectations from the communities users to which their work is directed.

Lastly, it is sought them to reach an aesthetic-cultural formation that he/she helps them to face their professional activity in a creative way, and the interest for the general and professional culture, like part their ethical formation and aesthetics and I eat positive motivation that spreads to avoid the pragmatism, the superficiality and the attraction toward consumption manifestations."¹⁶ That is to say that the function that is assigned to this discipline is great. To achieve their execution they would be necessary strategies, not single historiographies, but educational and a linking with the rest of the disciplines to

achieve the vital understanding of their own history and the handling of theoretical principles.

But, mainly, the favorable historical investigation to detect the values that have lasted through the time, and that operational function of the history, or of the knowledge of the architectural and urban evolution, it should propitiate a generalization of the conscience about the meaning of the inherited patrimony and of those solutions whose essence would be valid to consider presently.

For it, the strategies on historiography should be based on focuses able to put the relief the processes of continuity and rupture in the built atmosphere, as road of definition of those essential elements, which structure the values of the identity: they are those values those that can act like guide in the definition of roads to continue here in the construction of an appropriate theory for the and the now.

In the Cuban case, due to the traditional prevalence of the historiography in the theoretical speech of the architecture, the strategies should be directed, firstly, to solve the existent lacks. In the first place it is indispensable the establishment of a general mark where the processes historical matters can be located whose study would constitute a second agreement objective with the lagoons mentioned in the historical knowledge.

A third purpose would be to extend the analysis until the present, starting from a critical vision, aspect doesn't always present in some works where the descriptive factual prevails, on the other hand also necessary as base of more complete elaborations. The number of investigators – or historians – of the architecture and the urbanism has grown in the last two decades, but it is reduced for the universe to know. To overcome this situation would demand a coordination work, possible in a country with the dimensions of ours. That would facilitate to join efforts as long as it is an enormous patrimony to study and value that to disclose.

NOTES

¹ Charles Jencks: *The Architecture of the Jumping Universe*, London, 1995. To also see Tomás Maldonado's approaches: *Crítica de la razón informática*, Barcelona, 1998.

² Umberto Eco: *La struttura assente*, Milán, 1968; Gillo Dorfles: *El significado de la arquitectura*, Barcelona, 1969; Juan Pablo Bonta: *Sistemas de significación en arquitectura*, Barcelona, 1977.

³ Reyner Banham: "Problemas actuales del diseño ambiental", en *Actualidades Científico – Técnicas de la Arquitectura*, Facultad de Tecnología, La Habana, 1972.

⁴ Aldo Rossi: *La arquitectura de la ciudad*, Barcelona, 1976 (1966); Alan Colquhoun: "Tipología y métodos de diseño", *Arquitectura moderna y cambio histórico*, Barcelona, 1978; Gian F. Caniggia y G. L. Maffei: *Composizione architettonica e tipologia edilizia*, Roma, 1984; Eliana Cárdenas: "Conceptos de tipo y tipología", *Arquitectura y Urbanismo*, Vol. X, No. 2, La Habana, 1989; Abner Colmenares: *La cuestión de las tipologías arquitectónicas*, Caracas, 1991; Gian F. Caniggia: *Tipología de la edificación. Estructura del espacio antropológico*, Madrid, 1995.

⁵ To consult among others to Luis de las Rivas: *El espacio como lugar*, Valladolid, 1992. To also see the positions opposed among Vittorio Magnano Lampugnani who defends the continuity of the urban network and Daniel Libeskind, who defends the fracture: *A&U, Arquitectura y Vivienda* No. 50, Madrid, 1994, pp. 100/111. On deconstructivism to see: Jaques Derrida: "La deconstrucción como idea", *Arquitectónica*, Bilbao, Octubre 1989, pp. 15-28; y Philip Johnson y M. Wigley: *Architecture of Deconstructivism*, The Museum of Modern Art, Ed. G. Gilli, Barcelona, 1988; Peter Noever (Edit.): *The End of architecture?*, Munich, Nueva York, 1993.

⁶ Robert Venturi: *Complejidad y contradicción en la arquitectura*, Barcelona, 1972 (1966).

⁷ Christian Norberg-Schulz: *El significado de la arquitectura occidental*, Buenos Aires, 1979; Joseph Muntañola: *La arquitectura como lugar*, Barcelona, 1984; Kevin Lynch: *¿De qué tiempo es este lugar?*, Barcelona, 1976.

⁸ Vittorio Gregotti: *El territorio de la arquitectura*, Barcelona, 1972; Christopher Alexander: *El modo intemporal de construir*, Barcelona, 1979.

⁹ Manfredo Tafuri: *Progetto e Utopia*, Milán, 1973; *Teorías e historia de la arquitectura*, Barcelona, 1972. Other investigators of the IUAU with important contribution: Francesco Dal Co, Massimo Cacciari, Franco Rella, Paolo Corcarelli, M. Manieri Elia, Giorgio Ciucci.

¹⁰ Nicos Hadjinicolaou: *Historia del arte y lucha de clases*, México, 1974 y Manuel López: *Historia de la arquitectura y lucha de clases*, Caracas, 1977.

¹¹ "Significance of Cuba in the contemporary architectural culture", *Critical Thought* No. 32, Havana, September, 1969, and that of Rafael López Rangel: "Christopher Alexander: the design and the culture of the dominance", *Architecture-Cuba*, Us. 343-344, Havana, 1973. This focus is appreciated in the authors mentioned in texts like that of Roberto Segre: "Significación de Cuba en la cultura arquitectónica contemporánea", *Pensamiento Crítico* No. 32, La Habana, septiembre, 1969, and Rafael López Rangel: "Christopher Alexander: el diseño y la cultura de la dominación", *Arquitectura-Cuba*, Nos. 343-344, La Habana, 1973. A bigger width of López Rangel's focuses appears in its: *Contribución a la visión crítica de la arquitectura*, Puebla, 1977.

¹² Marina Waisman: *El interior de la historia. Historiografía arquitectónica para uso de latinoamericanos*, Bogotá, 1990.

¹³ Eliana Cárdenas: *Arquitectura y urbanismo: Una valoración historiográfica*, La Habana, enero 2002 (inédito).

¹⁴ Alberto Petrucci: "La arquitectura regional como transgresión", *Arquitectura y Urbanismo* No. 2/92, La Habana, 1992.

¹⁵ Kenneth Frampton: "El regionalismo crítico: arquitectura moderna e identidad cultural", *A&U, Monografías de Arquitectura y Vivienda* No. 3, Madrid, 1985 y *Studies in Tectonic Culture. The Poetic of Construction in XIX and XX Century Architecture*, Cambridge, 1995. Una visión un poco diferente es la de Ignasi de Solà-Morales, "Identidad y diferencia. Regionalización versus regionalismo", en *Memorias del Tercer Seminario de Arquitectura y Urbanismo de América Latina y el Caribe "Erwin Walter Palm"*, Universidad Nacional Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Santo Domingo, 1997, pp. 41/51.

¹⁶ Eliana Cárdenas y Ángela Rojas: *Objetivos y programas de la Disciplina de Teoría e Historia de la Arquitectura, Plan de estudios de la carrera de Arquitectura*, La Habana, 1994.