

Mediating Between Cultures

Architectural attitudes towards a globalizing world

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“Quod Nihil Scitur”

Francisco Sanches (c. 1550–1623)

“That nothing is known”

Perfect knowledge of things seems beyond the human capabilities
for the nature of objects and our human nature do not allow us to fully comprehend.
Culture seems to be a prime example of an ungraspable concept.

Personal statement

While travelling abroad one cannot help but notice that the world is increasingly interconnected. In Kenya I found myself listening to American hip-hop while using public transport. Strolling past a cinema in the remote island of Lamu I witnessed posters trying to lure spectators for Bollywood productions. Looking at a menu in a typical restaurant in Cambodia the offer often ranges from Italian pizza to English fish and chips. I could continue with these examples but I think it is clear that the world is affected by a process of cultural blending. When reading history books it is fair to say that this process has always been there. However, referring to a widely discussed topic, one could say that the process is now evolving at a much faster pace. A general term used for this process is globalization, in writing this essay I will briefly address some of its consequences. Being aware of the enormous range of this topic my research focuses on the implications of globalization on the field of architecture.

A final example illustrates the type of implication I will address in this thesis. In Bangkok numerous gigantic malls have been built. These air-conditioned environments, complete with global brand shops and restaurants, lure customers away from traditional small shops. In fact, similar malls can increasingly be found all across the world. Experiencing this development leads me to pose the defining question of this essay: Which architectural attitudes are valid in a seemingly increasingly homogeneous globalized world?

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Abstract

The general aim of this essay is to better understand the effects of globalization on architecture as well as its inherent possibilities. This research has specifically been oriented on architectural attitudes towards these processes.

In order to gain an understanding of globalization processes their socio-economic consequences are first analysed. The growth of economies stands in direct relation to foreign trade. To a large extent internationally operating firms are responsible for this trade. In order to conduct cross-border business smoothly a network of globally operating firms has developed. These multinationals operate primarily in so-called 'global cities'. This network of global cities is growing and is increasingly imbedded in all parts of the world.

These economic processes instigate socio-cultural consequences on a global scale. Part of our findings is that technological and economic progress seems to prompt cultural erosion. Cultural erosion is explained as one of the consequences of the branding strategies used by globally operating companies. In applying these strategies these firms often disregard existing local cultures. Through several examples this essay demonstrates the relevance of the existing different cultural settings.

The globalization issues are examined by discussing two seemingly opposite architectural attitudes: Regionalism and Deconstructivism. The former seems to advocate historical continuity, the latter seems to endorse flexibility and progress. The complexity of cultural representation is discussed through an analysis of acknowledged Regionalist examples. The pitfalls of historical abuse and generalization are also exemplified. Deconstructivism is explained through some of the subversions introduced by Rem Koolhaas. Since both attitudes have many subjective interpretations two case studies of their practitioners (OMA and Luis Barragán) clarify their workings. .

The final section tries to demonstrate the sensitivity of both approaches in regard to the globalization processes that were described. Considering that globalized environments are not homogenous we conclude by recommending a strategy that involves analytical research of socio-cultural constructs.

Introduction

In order to portray a meaningful view on globalization its general nature will first be described. As will be demonstrated, the process can hardly be viewed as a new phenomenon. Instead of elaborating on the term and its history this essay will showcase some of its consequences. Since these effects relate to many fields, a categorization has been introduced. Discussing the globalization's socio-economic and cultural consequences separately will hopefully lead us to a better understanding of the process as a whole.

After this general discussion of globalization we will narrow our scope to the field of architecture. As can be anticipated, the globalization process has generated various and sometimes opposing reactions. This essay will address a tension within architectural theory, one that is in direct relation to globalization. The tension that we will discuss exists between two seemingly opposed architectural approaches. Both are hard to depict neatly and labelling them with specific terms will not do them justice. However, in order to facilitate the readability of the essay we will refer to them as Regionalism and Deconstructivism. What is meant by them will be formulated during the course of this work.

The core of this essay consists of an attempt to understand what characterizes these approaches. As we will demonstrate, both approaches take in a different attitude towards culture. These cultural attitudes can only be understood in relation to the Modern movement. A brief explanation of this Movement will therefore precede the analysis of these approaches.

The final section aims to bring together the two attitudes by discussing some of their inherent paradoxes. In this section we will try to formulate a way to mediate between existing cultures. The intension of this essay is to search for a strategy that could validate architecture as genuine cultural expressions.

I The concept of globalization

The term globalization touches on countless aspects. To create a meaningful scope for this essay, which will focus on architecture, it might be useful to sketch a brief overview of the range of this term.

Throughout history countries have affected each other through their respective economics, politics, and cultures. We can go back as far as early Greece to notice mankind's cultural-economic linkages. For nations have always influenced each other, be it through exploration, trade or war or through a peculiar combination of these. Medicinal practices of the Greeks are believed to be based on Egyptian knowledge. Roman philosophy, politics, arts and architecture were greatly influenced by Greek conceptions. Goods such as spices, cloths, ceramics and all kind of other trades have shaped cultures in geographically remote areas. Whereas internationally tea is now thought to be a typical English beverage, we almost seem to neglect its south Chinese origin. The Dutch cuisine is represented mainly through its potato-based dishes but we seem to have forgotten that the crop was brought to Europe from Peru by Spanish conquistadores in the sixteenth century. Even more obvious is the everlasting influence of Greek/Roman architecture. The 'classical' style has been adopted by countless countries, thereby shaping the design of urban plans, representative buildings and villas all across the world.

Many other examples could further demonstrate that cultures, sciences and economies have always been interwoven throughout history. What also becomes clear from these examples is that it is extremely difficult to view socio-economic and cultural influences separately. Trying to do this could however sharpen our conception of the process.

Socio-economic aspects

For decades, experts have discussed a peculiar process with life-altering consequences: the massive migration of people toward cities. In just a few decades urban areas of notably developing countries have grown exponentially. Starting in the nineteenth century, industrialization functioned as a magnet that pulled people towards cities. Urbanization, as this specific migration can be called, has been continuously linked to the industrialization process. (Soja and Kanai, 2007, 63) This migration caused a radical change in the ways that people work, eat, and spend their free time. For now, our focus will remain on the socio-economic consequences of globalization. In addition to industrialization another force is driving the ever growing predominance of urban areas: the interconnectivity of economies. This interconnectivity defines the socio-economic side of the globalization process, understanding the latter requires us to look into the nature of this connectivity.

In comparison to pre-industrial times it is safe to say that global interconnectivity has increased dramatically. This is mainly due to the countless technical novelties that radically altered a variety of fields. In about one hundred years the industries of transportation, chemistry, communication and energy-production have undergone almost unconceivable changes.¹ (Green, 2002, 365-68) The rapid development of these and other fields show that new means of exchanging information and goods have defined contemporary world conditions. The world-wide exchange is strongly facilitated by the use of all these technologies. In turn this exchange concurrently links and shapes economies: therefore this linkage of economies has been labelled as 'economic globalization'.

Economies have grown ever more interdependent through an increasing cross-border movement of goods, service technologies and capital. (Sassen, 2007, 23,24) Why do countries allow such interdependency? Reversing the question makes this easier to comprehend: What are the effects of international trade on economical growth? A conclusive report of the International Monetary Fund (IMF)

¹ For instance we can think of the rapid sequence of novelties in communication: the telegraph, the telephone, cell phones and currently the Internet. We could also mention that since industrial times bicycles, trains, cars and airplanes have increased man's speed of travelling drastically. As a result mankind's use of horses as a means of transportation seems to belong in a distant past.

addresses this issue. The findings are revealing, globalizing countries have an accelerated growth of their gross domestic product (GDP)² However, experts have criticized the notion that GDP growth rates can be regarded as distinctive evidence of globalization.³ Specific circumstances of a country such as for instance its geographic location or its domestic policy could strongly influence the GDP value. To eliminate these and other concerns the IMF introduced several stabilizing factors. To name a few: the effect of policy stability as well as the trends in decade-over-decade GDP changes. With these factors taken into account these adjusted figures still clearly show that trade has a significant effect on economical growth. (Dollar and Kraay, 2001, 10-18) The IMF report demonstrates that globalization is positive in an economic sense. However, and perhaps more importantly, does everyone benefit from it?

According to the same IMF analysis international trade substantially improves the growth rate of developing countries. At the same time these effects do not systematically increase income inequality. In general, economic globalization contributes to rising incomes and falling poverty. (Dollar and Kraay, 2001, 18) However, we should also remember that economic prosperity does not necessarily mean that people are happier. The 'New Economics Foundation' (NEC) has introduced a refreshing perspective on the performance of countries. Using a happiness-index the foundation attempts to portray the 'real' wellbeing of countries. Therefore the index measures human development from another perspective, taking into account aspects such as life satisfaction and life expectancy. (Marks, et al., 2006, 2,9) The report questions the common goals of societies. It can be read as a manifest to view development more sensibly.⁴ Though it is disputably more intelligent to view development from this angle, it would not

² Starting with a value of 2,9% in the 1960s to a value of 5,0% in the 1990s. In contrast, non-globalizing countries witnessed falling rates of GDP-growth, from 3,3% in the 1970s to 1,4% in the 1990s. (Dollar and Kraay, 2001, 2)

³ Firstly the GDP may reflect geographical determinants of growth rather than trade policy. For example, small countries close to major markets tend to trade more than countries that are large or remote. Secondly, domestic policy reforms may be related to the moment of trade liberalization. Domestic policy choices affect the country's GDP's growth. Therefore the effects of trade liberalization cannot be isolated from other growth-enhancing policies. Thirdly, the direction of effects is hard to identify: are economies that grow quickly more likely to trade more? (Rodriguez and Rodrik, 2000, 4-8)

⁴ It should also be noted that the current data-sets are not old enough to co-relate them with the rate of economic globalization. The relation between the NEC index-values and enormous GDP-growth of developing countries remains an interesting research topic.

address the issues that this essay will try to unravel. In order to refocus on the economic globalization we should identify its main actors. Preceding this, where is the process most prominent?

Aforementioned was a social consequence of economic globalization: urbanization. This ongoing migration affects the lives of millions of people, but how can we explain its connection with economic globalization? A major reason is the economic potential of urban areas. This potential can partly be explained by the paradigm of the 'global city'. These global cities can best be described by the two key functions they behold. For one, they connect geographically dispersed markets and production units and they could therefore be regarded as base points. (Friedmann, 1986, 71) Secondly they serve as command points from where economic activities are being managed and controlled. (Sassen, 2001, 5) In consequence, it appears that the more a city is connected (or globalized) the higher is its rate of development in the sense of economical performance and quality of life. (Wall, 2010, 56-61) Established global cities we should think of New York, London, Tokyo and Paris. More recently Hong Kong can be added to this list.⁵ (Sassen, 2001, 347-48)

Over time globally operating firms established their offices in strategic places of the world economy. Together their offices form a network that allows cross-border business to be conducted smoothly. International economic flows therefore relate strongly to the presence of large multinational firms.⁶ Without going into breaking down every aspect we could argue that they have an increasing influence on cities. We can think of the provision of financing, jobs, knowledge, technology, human capital and infrastructure. (Alderson and Beckfield, 2004, 811), In respect of the scope of this essay we should understand how their presence affects the cities they reside in. In the next fragment we will address the

⁵ In January 2008, the American magazine TIME discussed the increasing interconnectivity of New York, London and Hong Kong. The issue, named "Ny-lon-kong", highlights the increasing importance of Hong Kong on global financial flows. (Elliott, 2008)

⁶ Foreign direct investments (FDI) are investments from one firm into another foreign one. With these investments, one firm gains control over the activities of another. A relative limited number of firms is responsible for these FDI. The top 500 multinationals in 2004 accounted for 90% of global FDI and 50% of world trade. (Rugman, 2005, 3) The share of urban infrastructure in total FDI stocks globally is approximately 10%, compared to only 2% in 1990 (Miroux, 2008, xx (preface)). Global urban development is therefore fundamentally linked to these investments. (Wall, 2010, 456-58)

cultural consequences of their manifestations. However, another question has to be answered first. Is the number of global cities set? Or does economic globalization, with its social consequences, only relate to established global cities?

The Globalization and World Cities Research Network (GaWC) established a list of cities which link major economic regions of the world economy. Part of its findings is that the number of offices, and their respective size, is indicative of the connectedness of cities to the global economy. This connectivity-value is determined based on the assumption that more information, capital etc. flow through the larger offices. As expected, the top-connectivity rates are found in the cities discussed in Saskia Sassen's renowned book: London, New York, Tokyo. But data also proves that one third of the foremost connected cities is located in middle income countries. This shows that the world economy is organized and governed from multiple locations, not only through cities of the developed countries. We should therefore understand that the network does not consist of the main offices of globally operating corporations. The numerous cities where the production of the world market is carried out also take part in the global economic management and governance. (Sassen, 2007, 98, Parnreiter, 2010) The implication of this finding is that an increasing number of cities throughout the world comes in contact with globally operating corporations.

Far from being a complete overview of the socio economic consequences, this first section only serves to provide a limited exploration of them. As we have discussed, globalization can be viewed as a function of international corporations and global communications. The tendency to focus only on those aspects is understandable since they are the most noticeable constituents of the process. However other entities also affect social conditions, for instance global institutions and multiple transboundary networks.⁷ (Sassen, 2007, 5,6) Another fundamental condition of globalization we should point out is the continuous tendency to overvalue financial services. In comparison to the many industrial, manufacturing or social

⁷ The extent to which the World Trade Organization (WTO) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) regulate capital streams can only be guessed. The social consequences of their international policies affect local economies throughout the world. In respect of transboundary networks one can think of activists that strive for environmental standards or human rights. These activists are increasingly working within global networks. (Sassen, 2007, 5,6)

services, financial services achieve disproportionate profits. This is important to recognize because ethnicity seems to be linked to lower profit services. While these non-financial jobs form important constituents of the economies they reside in, they are often unrecognized and undervalued in the context of globalization. (Sassen, 2007, 111-18) This recognition is important for the fact that these (work) cultures are an important constituent of the global cities.

In conclusion, one can say that it is safe to assume that profitable economic globalization will continue. If the number of global cities will increase the following question becomes relevant: What is to become of the 'local cultural identity in a world confronted by the forces of globalization, be they economic, political or cultural?' (Short and Kim, 1999, 15) This question delineates the general topic of this essay. We should however already be aware of the complexity of the issue. For instance the meanings of the terms culture, identity and locality have been continually under debate. To maintain a certain focus we will review possible reactions to the influences of globalization. Before we address this topic we will discuss the cultural significance of global corporations on the cities they reside in.

Cultural-economic aspects

To better understand the cultural impact of globalization we will analyze the presence of multinational firms. As discussed, economic globalization is linked to the presence of these companies. For several reasons companies often engage a strategy that can be labelled as 'branding'. This strategy merges the realms of both culture and economy. So firstly, what is branding exactly?

Globalization can be experienced directly by individuals as geographical borders are become more diffuse. More than ever before in history people can follow their own individual needs and desires. This is especially true for people of developed countries, for they have gained the freedom to travel either physically or 'mentally'. The use of airplanes used to be a privilege, yet in just a few decades it has evolved into a common way to travel. The prices for flying have dropped to affordable rates for the majority of people in developed countries. (Dobruszkes, 2006, 249) Perhaps even more significant is the immensely increased amount of digital globe-trotting. A report of the International Telecommunications Users Group (ITU) considers 30% of the world's population as Internet users. Additionally, the report states the unsurprising fact that telecommunication and Internet is becoming more affordable all across the globe. (ITU, 2011, 3,11)

This increased freedom creates the ability to encounter other cultures. However, this could also strongly contribute to cultural fragmentation because the enhanced freedom confronts travellers with realities that are different from their own. While travelling the subjectivity of the traveller's conceptions becomes more apparent. Anna Klingmann even warns us that this cultural fragmentation increases a sense of disorientation and a desire for belonging. According to her, experiencing this freedom triggers an urge to formulate a more definite identity. In a way multinationals have jumped in to fulfil this need with identity-defining products and services. In essence, the social values and lifestyles used to be defined by nationhood and religion. However, the emergence of brand products has taken a decisive part in defining their consumer's values and lifestyles. (Klingmann, 2007, 54) This claim will become more evident when we consider a brand such as Nike.

Nike is an example of a brand which offers the customer an identity. Its identity can be loosely framed with concepts such as freedom and self-empowerment. In order to connect to such concepts, Nike's

products are purposely transformed to the ever-changing lifestyle trends. With these adaptations, the brand guarantees a sense of continuity. Nike evokes the feeling of quality partly by its notion of 'uniqueness' yet, paradoxically, their products are achieved by mechanisms of standardization. At the same time the Nike products create a sense of community, people with shared interests and tastes are recognizable throughout the world because of the products they wear and use. (Betsky, 1997, 23) The Nike products provide orientation and distinction in a world of changing consumer values. They do not only accommodate lifestyle-trends, they often try to define it. (Klingmann, 2007, 55) Before we sum up the effects of a brand such as Nike, we will examine another brand: McDonald's.

The McDonald's restaurant chain has become the world's largest retail property owner. Simultaneously fast food is the most rapidly growing sector within the foodservice industry. (Schwartz, 2004, 3) The restaurant chain makes the effort to supply products that look, feel and taste the same everywhere around the world. (Watson, 2000, 122) By means of its architecture of recognizable red and yellow-coloured buildings and signs, McDonalds has attracted millions of customers throughout the world. The signature red mansard roofs and the plastic fibre interiors were its international standard for almost thirty years. In 2006 the traditional red colour was muted to a terra-cotta red and olive-green has been introduced to the logo and interiors. The plastic interiors have been replaced more 'natural' materials like brick and wood.⁸ The brand's iconic yellow arches remain an important marketing tool. (Gogoi, 2006)

What do these examples show us? That the consumer world has become more homogenized? This conclusion might be too hastily derived, but swapping McDonald's or Nike for other brands would lead us to similarly constructed identities. Just mentioning a brand name such as Hilton, Ikea, Apple, Disney is likely to generate a carefully constructed consumer feeling and image. The similarity between these brands is that they offer consumers products or services on a global scale, ignoring the differences between sometimes extremely contrasting cultures. How to analyse such a process? To refocus our scope we will discuss the causes and consequences of branding within the built environment.

⁸ The 2006 documentary film 'An Inconvenient Truth' seems to have introduced, at least to a unprecedented wide audience, sustainability as a global issue. Ever since, going 'green' and 'sustainable' appears to have become part of the standard marketing strategies. Mc Donald's green background can probably be explained as an attempt to create a more eco-friendly image.

Corporate architecture, as an integral part of the corporate identity, is used as a display for the values of the company. By using recognizable architectural forms companies try to send a message. The company's real estate thereby serves as an advertisement for consumers, investors and employees. Additionally this architectural branding responds to the consumers' demand for a certain recognizable comfort. When confronted to a foreign environment, be it another culture, country but also another domestic city, people tend to long for recognizable products and experiences. To accommodate this demand multinationals offer recognizable menus, merchandise, hotel interiors and even architecture. Standardized forms and formulas are then implemented, ultimately resulting in a homogenous chain of hotels, franchise restaurants, shopping malls and skyscrapers. (Lewis, 2002) Because the buildings are largely based on distinctive visibility, their architecture often fails to engage the local context, (Klingmann, 2007, 267-68) but instead of being bored with the sameness of brand products, many consumers have learned to rely on it.

We can now link the corporate branding to our socio-economic findings. As mentioned in the previous section economic globalization is, at least for an important part, determined by the activity of multinationals. With their need for a global network the number of global cities will gradually increase. Their corporate presence, often based on branding strategies, will thereby lead to a repetition of similar buildings within the global cities. This development could be regarded as part of the inevitable changes bound to economic progress, but should we accept this? Especially when we consider that experiencing other cultures is part of the reason people travel. Places like Tokyo, Sydney, Paris but also picturesque small villages in France would resemble each other more. Corporate branding could erode the now distinctive cultures in these places. However, their presence could be seized as an opportunity.

As the socio-economic section pointed out, the nature of the global economy is based on an increased neutralization of place and distance through means of transportation and communication technologies. In turn these means facilitated the growth of an interconnected network of multinational corporations. Saskia Sassen underscores the local dimension of the described global socio-economic system. Referring to numerous other writers, Sassen states that the seemingly hyper-mobile nature of the global economy is actually deeply embedded in locally based recourses and services. Specialized economic histories of major cities and urban regions still make use of their local networks and division of functions. (Sassen, 2007, 277, 85) Before attending to the architectural reactions we will try to draw conclusions based on the stated findings.

Globalization

In the previous two sections, we only briefly explored some of the consequences related to globalization. How then can this multi-faceted process be framed? As an attempt to grasp the full extent of the process Manfred Steger summarized globalization to be 'a set of complex socio-economic processes that create and intensify worldwide interdependencies'. This results in an unprecedented compression of space and time, strongly linked to technological innovations. (Steger, 2005, 13) As demonstrated in the first section economic globalization is likely to enhance financial prosperity. From a negative point of view globalization can be labelled as a process of standardization. In that sense a globalized culture spreads and creates sameness all across the world. (Eldemery, 2009, 344-46) The emergence of branding as a corporate strategy noticeably increases this repetition.

Also within the architectural field the branding process generates sameness in forms and interior experiences. A conflict emerges between the market for 'brand' products/experiences and the 'market' for local distinctiveness. This paradox stands at the heart of the essay. As many travellers have experienced, international brands now dominate many built environments. The branding issue is especially visible in globalized, often commercial/tourist, parts of a city. Traditionally, architecture reflected culture, climate and topography of different regions. The branding process often neglects this (Eldemery, 2009, 344-46). To formulate the general problem we could say that the 'identity' of international brands might lead to sameness in global cities. Additionally, standardized building methods and architectural prototypes can increasingly be experienced everywhere. Since we have found that the spread of global cities continues it is relevant to formulate an attitude towards the globalization process.

Even though we might experience homogeneous built environments, Sassen reminds us that the global economy is linked to a multiplicity of economies and (work) cultures, their presence seems to be a general property of global cities. Nonetheless, these cities might end up being dominated by recognizable corporate architecture. Their dominant presence might accentuate the 'otherness' of the cities' less dominant cultures. (Sassen, 2007, 124-25) Because, as Klingmann warns us, 'simply following the demands of the market is bound to promote stereotypical developments that result in bland homogeneity'. (Klingmann, 2007, 262) For better or worse, foreign firms can therefore profoundly mark the urban settings in which they operate in.

These developments raise the issue of cultural identity, Can cultural identities still be defined? If so, is it even possible to represent them in a non-superficial way? Is it possible to legitimize an attitude that neglects local culture altogether? Resolving this everlasting conflict with a set of design rules would undermine the creativity of design firms. Showing the extremes in the debate will help to improve our understanding of these issues. This first segment proved the importance of a conscious architectural attitude in the globalizing world.

II Theoretical positioning

The consequences of economic globalization always seem to have been a topic of discussion. From the earliest stages of industrialization theoreticians have discussed and sometimes even predicted the consequences of globalization.⁹ The numerous different perceptions on how the world of the future should function has generated a broad spectrum of reactionary theories. This is particularly the case in the realms of architecture and urbanism, for those discipline have always been triggered to envision a new and different future. Architect Giorgio Grassi once stated that architecture could be differentiated as having two components: its technical construction and its theoretical background. The theoretical component can be defined as the ethics from which architects determine their design decisions. A defined set of ethics can serve both as a starting point and as a critical element for the conception of architecture. (Engel, et al., 1995, 7) At a glance it is obvious that a modern city contains different and contrasting buildings. A city therefore reflects the astounding number of different attitudes within the realm of architecture. If we examine the background of the design of the different buildings of a city we are introduced to the realm of architectural theory. The everlasting debates within the field of architecture have generated many writings as is evidenced by the multitude of thick theory books.

To relate the above to the topic of globalization this essay limits itself to two seemingly opposite theories. On one end of the spectrum we can find Rem Koolhaas' progressive ideas, where local culture seems to be regarded as insignificant for future cities. On the opposite side we find a way of thinking that embraces cultural manifestation and even views it as a necessity. Koolhaas seems to endorse systemization in the name of progress while the opposing force advocates historical continuity and cultural diversity. The latter seeks to safeguard existing architectural culture, the former promotes innovation and flexibility. (Lewis, 2002) This complex balance forms the heart of this essay. Both attitudes may be explained as reactions to a process of modernization, We will therefore start with their relation to the past. This crucial background will enable us to better understand them.

⁹ The book 'An inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations' is considered as one of the first modern works of economics. In this fundamental work Adam Smith set out to describe the workings of a free market economic system.

The Modern movement

As mentioned earlier in this essay, major developments have reshaped societies during the nineteenth century. New means of communication, bio-chemical observations and discoveries in engineering fuelled a new confidence. This new spirit got people to interpret the universe as a mechanism that could be analyzed and understood. Formerly accepted conceptions were put into question. This way of thinking catalyzed radical and controversial revisions in fields such as society, biology, psychology and philosophy.¹⁰ Many other fields could be listed to illustrate a general spirit of reconsideration. Essential for our understanding is that the architectural Modern movement was in line with these developments.

The designs of the Modern movement are hard to categorize under one particular design style. The movement can however be described with a few notions. For one, the form and layout of the design came under a strong influence of exactly determined functions of the buildings. The famous dictum 'form follows function' is illustrative to this way of thinking. Additionally the language of the movement had been identified as one of simple, floating volumes and clear-cut geometries. This language could be retraced to influential texts such as 'ornamentation is crime'.¹¹ According to this text, an evolved culture distinguishes itself through the abstention of ornaments. Combining the two thoughts created the concept of architecture designed as an efficient machine. (Curtis, 1996) An almost Darwinist process of selection was applied within architecture in order to reach architectural optima for each function.

¹⁰To name a few, Karl Marx proposed a new structure for Western societies. Naturalist Charles Darwin reconsidered the relation of man and nature. Psycho-analyst Sigmund Freud questioned human free will, and perhaps even more disturbing were Friedrich Nietzsche's thoughts on the value and objectivity of truth. (Green, 2002, 368-74)

¹¹'Form follows function' has often been quoted out of a text by Louis Sullivan. It has been widely (mis)understood as the need to express the building's 'utility' or 'pragmatic use'. Adolf Loos further influenced this way of thinking by arguing that it is a waste of work and materials to create ornamentation. A more subtle understanding of the two would emphasize that the essence of a function should be expressed. (Heynen, et al., 2009, 21, 63)

To achieve this optimum architects based their designs on what they believed to be scientific rationality.¹² Perhaps most noticeably, the architecture of the movement tried to detach itself from existing historical styles and principles. Led by numerous visionaries the movement's drive towards progress encouraged architects to experiment with plans, shapes and material use. The movement spurred the use of contemporary building methods in combination with new construction materials. By the start of the 20th century, concrete, steel and glass were experienced as new and contemporary. For better or worse it often led to buildings that stood in contrast with their historical surroundings.¹³

Although the architecture style of the movement is difficult to frame, it was based on a consensus. That is on the hypothesis that society had become sick, and that it was doomed to fall apart if people would not intervene. With a new and modern approach, this process of degeneration could be stopped and reversed. Modernism would serve to organize a renewed, healthy and ordered society. (Rowe, 1995, 103) This seems to show the Modern movement's binding characteristic: its belief in the perfectibility of society. This confidence can be linked to the many scientific and technological breakthroughs we discussed earlier. (Avermaete, et al., 2009, 20-21) These breakthroughs had profoundly inspired the movement's belief in a rational 'scientific' approach to address all aspects of society.

This brief introduction to the Modern movement serves to better comprehend the reactionary attitudes we are about to discuss. Both reactions share a similar critique: they dismissed the presumably neutral rationality of the movement. As numerous authors demonstrated it to be a mere self-determined rationality, the dogmatic use of 'scientific' knowledge was put into question. The following section will explain the emergence of Regionalism, which also stands in direct relation to the globalization issues we introduced earlier.

¹² An example of this rationality is the publication of Neufert. In this book the exact needs of man are catalogued to precise measurements. The functional spatial needs are indicated for all sorts of activities: sitting, walking, eating, running etc. These exactly defined spaces were distinctive to this way of thinking.

¹³ It would be convenient to classify all architecture by using these principles and generalizations. In reality however differing circumstances and intentions engendered a variety of designs which could not be defined so easily. (Curtis, 1996)

The paradox of progress and culture

Predictably, the pioneering conceptions of the Modern movement were not shared by all. Especially the movement's acceptance of the rapid modernization was too radical for some. (Curtis, 1996, 567-70) After the second world war modern construction methods combined with specific stylistic approaches gradually replaced traditional historical ones. Among many others, Paul Ricoeur signalled the tension between the necessity for progress and the exigency of safeguarding cultural heritage. He even suggested that mankind was on the brink of becoming a single world civilization. This statement can be justified if we consider the relationship between man and technical tools. When a tool is invented it may in the first instance only be available to a certain privileged group. But it is in the nature of applied sciences that these do not belong to a specific group. (Ricoeur, 1965, 49-53) The spread of technical discoveries may be delayed by cultural or other circumstances but it can hardly be fully prevented.¹⁴ As we have previously discussed, globalization has enhanced the world's connectivity. Additionally we can assert that there is only one technical world of applied sciences. Its spread is irrepressible regardless of culture. Acknowledging this does imply that development and traditions are in conflict. Ricoeur's claim of one universal civilization therefore makes sense in this particular context. This particular issue stands at the core of the Regionalism theories.

Regionalism, as a set of theories, addresses the fear for the loss of culture. This fear is understandable when we recapitulate some of the consequences of economic globalization. Signalled was the increasing presence of multinational brand identities which seem to ignore cultural differences. Perhaps even more dangerous is the consumers' demand for recognizable products and experiences. In architecture this would lead to sameness in globalized cities. Various critics, historians and architects have been concerned with these developments. Combining some specific cases and insights can roughly clarify the intentions of Regionalism as a movement. These intentions are strongly linked to the idea of cultural identities, which we will briefly address before discussing the Regional movement.

¹⁴ The nuclear programs of several regimes prove to be a painful testimony to this fact. In 2003, a United States-led military force was sent to Iraq to prevent it from having nuclear technologies. This war has cost many lives and enormous amounts of money. This example shows that it is extremely difficult to prevent the spread of even the most advanced technologies.

Defining culture I

What is culture? This short question touches on an endless range of issues. Elaborating on a term as volatile as this would take us too far away from the topic. A short answer would be that culture is a complex of values. These values are defined by traditions and ethics and they delineate the attitudes that people have towards life, others and themselves. The great number of languages is a first indication that there are different civilizations. An examination of even the earliest stages of mankind shows that there always have been distinctive and incoherent cultures. Far from being static, these cultures have evolved and adapted to changing conditions. Cultural change can be immediately connected to thinkers, writers, sages, artists or even architects. These people instigate cultural change, therefore culture is intrinsically linked to a form of creativity.

What distinguishes active cultures from extinct ones is their ability to change. Revisions or adaptations are important elements of an active and living culture. (Ricoeur, 1965, 49-53) The above mentioned world-wide spread of multinationals brings us to the central issue of Regionalism. How is it possible to reconcile the necessity for change and adaptation while avoiding a complete erosion of cultures? Regionalism proposes a balance between local and contemporary. In an attempt to understand the complexity of this balance we will discuss several cases.

Regionalism

A first understanding of Regionalism is that it cannot be regarded as a formal theory or practice. A common misconception is to think of Regionalism as a form of traditional, vernacular architecture. It should rather be viewed as a subset theory, lingering within realms of romanticism, eclecticism, revivalism, modernism and postmodernism. (Canizaro, 2007, 16-17) Before we try to formulate the essence of the movement, several examples will demonstrate the range of its architecture.

A reflection of Catalan culture can be found in the extraordinary work of Antoni Gaudi. His intense architecture of fantasy and colours cannot be framed within a historical style. Historic Moorish influences of the region are acknowledged and blended with both Gothic and Baroque building traditions. His buildings are completed using the prospering ceramic, stonecutting and ironworking trades of his time. Accounted as one of the visionaries of the Modern movement, the Finnish Alvar Aalto appropriated regional expressions. His buildings reinterpreted building traditions without conceding to a form of conservatism. Aalto cleverly made use of new possibilities of the Finnish wood-industries. He used the industry's standardization of elements in such a way that his architecture remained responsive to its surroundings. He instigated the concepts of place-oriented and organic architecture.

A completely different example is the architecture of the Frank Lloyd Wright. This American was able to find the potential of even the most unpromising contexts. His architecture made use of regional elements that had been undervalued and overlooked by other architects for generations. Simultaneously he was able to reinvent the layout of housing plans; his architecture was in that sense very progressive. While creating modern architecture Luis Barragán's work seems to be rooted in his native Mexican culture. Similar to Aalto's work, he developed architecture sensitive to his native climate, landscape and culture. The later is exemplified in the way that public and private spaces are interlinked, acknowledging Mexican cultural conventions. (Speck, 1987, 74-79)

How can such diverse outcomes of the movement be framed under one theory? Similar to the Modern movement, Regionalism is not formal theory but it should rather be viewed as a mindset. What binds this mindset is the idea that the local cultural heritage should not be neglected. The paradox is that its architecture *should* reflect the contemporary. The given examples incorporated both constituents of the theory successfully, but what are the pitfalls in representing local heritage?

A first danger we encounter with representing the local is generalization. In order to form an image of the local, whole regions are often generalized. Wendell Berry stresses that this generalization often results in stereotypes that are based on false conceptions. Misunderstandings or false motives could therefore

create a superficial culture. (Berry, 2007, 37,39) In 2001 the municipal government of Shanghai launched a project called 'One City, Nine Towns'. To meet the China's rapid urbanization, the Shanghai municipality tries to relieve the current central core urban system by intruding a poly-nuclear model. For the identity of these new cores historic American and European 'themes' have been chosen.¹⁵(Hartog, 2010, 300) This low-density urban strategy could be viewed as a positive humanist approach when we compare it to China's seemingly default high rise extensions. Regardless of the possible positive effect on liveability, this strategy raises the question of authenticity. It seems evident that these historic theme towns will generate new meanings for their residents, for they are completely disconnected from their original time and context.

Another pitfall is when regionalist expressions become a form of nationalism. Berry warns us that nationalist feelings are spurred when myths and abstractions are valued apart from the place they originated from. In this form these would merely function as a form of prestige. This superficial culture then degenerates into narrow minded condescension and misplaced pride. (Berry, 2007)

As a controversial example we could bring forward the architecture of the German national socialist (Nazi) regime. The regime commissioned artists and architects to express a state-defined German culture.¹⁶ As part of its doctrine the leaders had carefully installed the idea that true Germans belonged to a mythical Aryan race. In order to re-initiate the lost German soul several historical sources were conveniently chosen. For one, the Aryans were connected to early Greece. This legitimated the regime's choice for classical art and architecture. Secondly the regime encouraged a form of national romanticism for German towns. This *volkish* type of architecture was employed to reintroduce a mythical medieval period, where towns were not corrupted by cosmopolitan influences. In both cases, architecture served as a form of social education, the so called 'Word in Stone'. (Taylor, 1974, 13, 30) The Bauhaus, as an important instigator of the Modern movement, was considered as harmful and un-German. Albert Speer became the regime's chief architect. He used an abstracted form of classical architecture for the representation of the state. (Scobie, 1990, 36) In retrospect, both the *volkish* and the neo-classical segments of the Nazi architecture can easily be dismissed as not being a form of Regionalism. The *volkish* architecture simply replicates a historic way of building. The neo-classical segment refers to a

¹⁵ The application of the chosen 'themes' as they are called, were for instance Spanish, Italian, German, Dutch, Scandinavian and British. The Nine Towns plan is an investment for the middle class' need for suburbs, but they completely neglect their Chinese context. The plan stands in direct relation to the country's economic growth, which in turn is strongly linked to the globalization process.

¹⁶ The totalitarian party had increasingly prescribed the direction in which culture should go. In 1933 the Reichskulturkammer was established, this state body determined which artists and architects would get assignments. (Ades, 1995, 261)

Greek/Roman building tradition. Speer's over-proportioned buildings were used to exhibit the states prestige with two simultaneous effects. It stimulated a form of national pride while also claiming respect for the regime's authority. Both state defined forms of architecture were part of the regime's propaganda, but they were neither regional nor contemporary.

So how *can* architecture rightfully lay a claim on local culture? From the examples it becomes clear that imitation of the past would not fulfil the goals of Regionalism.¹⁷ To specify these intentions Kenneth Frampton tried to formulate the grounds for a true Regionalist expression. With his polemic he confirmed the dangers of superficial historical quoting and vernacular imitations. Subsequently, Regionalism should oppose the rootedness and homogeneity of mainstream Modernism. (Frampton, 2007, 378) Aware that these could be regarded as opposing notions, he tried to clarify how for the balance between local and contemporary should work. He explained that Regionalist architecture should reflect and serve the limited constituencies of the place it is intended for. The tools to achieve this should be derived indirectly from a place's peculiarities. (Frampton, 1985, 21) Frampton proposed that specific conditions could be related to the local climate and the site's topography. Additionally, tactile senses should be engaged to promote a sense of locality within the building. The starting notions for this are the use of natural light and ventilation. Frampton's propositions were refined by Juhani Pallasmaa. He produced a more abstract notion of specific local constituents proposing that a sense of locality comprises natural, physical and social realities. These realities are shaped by nature, geography, landscape, local materials, skills and cultural patterns. Their experience and expression form an integral part of cultural tradition. The architect argues that this integral of cultural tradition should stand at the core of Regionalism. (Pallasmaa, 2007, 130-31)

By introducing a form of continuity in a defined cultural tradition we are starting to touch upon a profound attempt of creating a genuine culture-sensitive architecture. This strategy would serve as a delicate approach to resist the spread of a 'universal culture' as signalled by Ricoeur. As explained earlier, a cultural tradition is intrinsically not a static element. Since traditions, basically a set of perceptions, are continuously evolving, they offer opportunities for change. As Frampton argued, Regionalist expressions

¹⁷ The term Regionalism has been continuously rephrased and specified. In 1981, Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre had introduced the term Critical Regionalism, to further clarify its distinction from Regionalism as a historical style. If one reads the original definition of Regionalism, Critical Regionalism can hardly be called completely new as it seems to pursue the exact same goals.

should be beyond style.¹⁸ Traditions however, are interwoven with both history and particular realities of the moment. (Pallasmaa, 2007, 131) In a non-specific search of traditions, architects would avoid shallow and sentimental representations. The interpretation of this task is highly subjective, but defining culture is bound to be equally subjective. This approach therefore constitutes a first attempt to reconcile culture with a globalizing world. Before we evaluate the potential of this strategy we should discuss a seemingly opposing attitude towards globalization: Deconstructivism¹⁹.

¹⁸ Frampton declared eclecticism, where historic styles are used in to form an architectural pastiche, to be a mere 'cannibalistic lexicon'. He considered that direct historic quoting would only result in kitsch representations. For these historic 'citations' would be deprived of their original meaning and relevance. He warns for inappropriately 'quoting' Modernist principles. (Frampton, 2007, 377)

Deconstructivism¹⁹

As we suggested earlier the Modern movement's belief in a progress was linked to a state of mind. A belief that society could be improved through a rational 'scientific' approach. The Modern movement could therefore justify an approach that relinquished the past in the name of 'rational' progress. This belief introduced the idea that universal truths were finally being uncovered. However, numerous critics questioned this presumably neutral knowledge. To reveal the subjective nature of the movement's 'universal' knowledge Peter Eisenman portrayed an underlying relation between classical and modern architecture. He critiqued that both architectural styles derived design rules in a similar way from existing sources. While classical architecture was conceived following either divine or natural orders, the blueprints of modern architecture were based on a new definite order, the one deductive reason. (Eisenman, 2004) The architect therefore argues that a true revolutionary architecture should not try to set a new universal standard. The Modern movement only introduced a new set of ground rules. A truly new form of architecture would not embrace values derived outside itself.

To understand this difficult notion we will slowly unravel an understanding that deconstructs the objectivity of our perceptions. For the readability we will refer to it as Deconstructivism¹⁹. Eisenman concluded his analysis with the notion that architecture is bound to its intrinsic meaning. Therefore architecture is bound to represent the values it was conceived with at a specific moment in time. Eisenman's insight can be positioned as a logical follow-up to concepts that Rem Koolhaas had developed during his exploration of the Berlin wall. With this particular research Koolhaas reinterpreted perceptions of the built environment. In the summer of 1971 Koolhaas explored the relation between architecture and meaning. Contrary to accepted views he concluded that architecture could not be a power of social or political emancipation.²⁰ (Schrijver, 2008)

¹⁹ As mentioned in the introduction the label 'deconstructivism' does not depict a clear movement, but for this essay it will serve us to discuss an approach more adequately. Again we cannot emphasize enough on the danger to use such a volatile term. The term 'deconstructivism' is used to refer to its original philosophical background where meanings and understandings are strongly embedded in the perceiver. 'The postmodern subject has no rational way to evaluate a preference in relation to judgments of truth, morality, aesthetic experience or objectivity'. (Jones, 1998)

²⁰ He portrayed his finding with a variety of photographs, where events near the Berlin wall show that people experience its presence in different ways. With this example he attempted to deconstruct the relations between use and meaning on the one hand, and the social implications of architecture on the other.

Another of Koolhaas' influential revisions is his attitude towards the common. Similar to pop-artists such as Andy Warhol he tried to reconcile art, in his case architecture, with mass-culture objects. By using seemingly banal industrial elements in his designs he changed the relationship between commercial architecture and critical avant-garde architecture. (Klingmann, 2007, 115-16) Instead of opposing the architecture of the Modern movement, Koolhaas ironically re-inscribed principles of modern architecture to become products for consumer society. In doing so he destabilized architecture's status as a high art.

Through both subversions Koolhaas attempts to make people reconsider known associations. Be they form or materials, Koolhaas rejects definite meanings. Here the connection can be made with Eisenman's insight; divorcing meaning from architecture could be an answer to the dilemma of identity. If meaning is withdrawn from architectural form, buildings can be interpreted in different ways. Local identity can then be derived from any architectural form, even if it does not correspond with other representative usages.

We should take a moment to reconsider this line of thought. Proclaiming an absolute detachment of the relation between meaning and form is unrealistic. Often dependent on culture, people will often generalize a particular meaning to a specific architectural form or material. Associations might change in time but certain physical and psychological human needs are bound to be static. For instance dimensions of spaces that exceed human eyesight will provoke a similar human experience regardless of culture. These and other sense-related examples²¹ demonstrate that human experience is bound to be defined by human characteristics. However, if we take Koolhaas' subversions completely serious we might misunderstand his intentions. His subversions are somewhat ironical, as a work of art they make the user reconsider established orders and principles. We could argue that making these statements as an architect is somewhat unethical because subversions that lead to expensive and perhaps unpractical architecture would serve no one. From another perspective experiments in material use have enriched architecture. The experimental iron aesthetics of the iron Eiffel tower were widely put into question during its construction. Evidently, the tower was later greatly appreciated. In the 21st century architects

²¹ Formal elements with certain proportions will always allow people to sit down and elements with a sharp angle will not. If the traditional use of wood on outdoor seating is replaced by steel it might still facilitate the same function. However this material intrinsically follows changing weather conditions. Steel will therefore become too hot to sit on in summertime and unpleasantly cold in winter. The acoustics of a space with hard and reflective materials will always be experienced unpleasant in comparison with a space that is surrounded with soft, porous materials.

increasingly experiment with fluidity, unknown forms are created with alternative materials.²² No one can tell if these or other architectural novelties will lead to new meanings and insights. It is therefore short-sighted to judge upon what should and should not be used in the built environment. Koolhaas' intellectual approaches could make way for new and groundbreaking associations. In the worst case it could inspire others to do so in yet another way.

Another important aspect of the way of thinking Koolhaas introduced relates to the essence of architecture. He introduced the notion of architecture as urban containers, where all kinds of specific non-related functions (programs in architecture jargon) come together.²³ (Koolhaas, 2004) Because of many contradictory elements within an urban container, he argues that this architecture only should serve as a flexible framework. An architecture that is adjustable to different and sometimes conflicting scenarios. This new relationship between concept and design can be viewed as a strategy with a main focus on responsiveness to change. With this attitude architecture is dissolved from a fixed order to become a temporary manifestation of forces. This architecture therefore embraces opportunism and the rapid fluctuations of the market demand. (Klingmann, 2007, 130)

In an interview in 1994 Koolhaas mentions his interest in an urbanism oriented on contrast, disconnection and contradictions. Contrary to previous viewpoints he declared that the contemporary built environment is one of co-existence and not one of cohesion. Architects should no longer try to adjust buildings to an existing continuous tissue. This new attitude would free their design from their architectural surroundings. Koolhaas finds it unrealistic that preconceived and definite urban plans offer liberty for processes and operations that cannot be defined or controlled. The preconceived judgements of such plans would limit the outcome of what can be built. A temporary conception of what is beautiful and what is not would define the appearance of buildings. Koolhaas argues that a more complex way of judging, unconstrained by ruling ideologies, would offer expression of the various other forces at play. The lack of a ruling ideology would prevent that the needs of a built environment are examined in a 'handicapped' manner.

²² To view examples of new materials and forms one could look up the different experimental approaches of architects such as Zaha Hadid, Jürgen Mayer, Kas Oosterhuis or many others.

²³ In his famous 1977 manifesto 'Life in the Metropolis' Koolhaas interpreted Manhattan and its skyscrapers in an unconventional way. Here he describes an odd blend of programs within the 'Downtown Athletic Club'-skyscraper. There Koolhaas guides us in an amusing way through series of unrelated events, from eating oysters to boxing and golfing. With this perception it becomes clear that a range of unforeseeable combinations of activities can take place within a building that has not been specifically designed for them.

Koolhaas is therefore in favour of decisions made in an amoral way. Such decisions would derive from both conscious and unconscious forces. This deliberate choice for amorality can be linked to his fascination of surrealism. He explains surrealism as a form of rationalism which does not pretend to be objective. In a way he views analysis to be identical to creation. (Polo, 1994, 20-31) It appears that Koolhaas seems to be seduced by the idea of evoking contradictory emotions. Be it through materials, forms or the positioning of programs or forms his designs often question known associations. This flexible way of thinking offers a lot of freedom during the design process. As a result we can hardly depict a signature Koolhaas style. The diverse architecture that bears his name stands in direct relation to the workings of his practice, the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA).

An important acknowledgement is that OMA produces architecture in design *teams*. Therefore Koolhaas should be regarded as a curator and perhaps an instigator of ideas within his firm. As we will explain later, OMA's designs are grounded on multidisciplinary analysis. Interpretation and creation of these analysis are influenced by many designers. OMA's diverse architecture can partly be explained with the office's constant input of new talents. A definite OMA style cannot be depicted when we consider that this influx obviously brings new vision to the firm.²⁴ Therefore we could say that OMA's sole characteristic is its dynamic interpretation of commissions. Koolhaas' subversions were analysed to show its deconstructive tendencies. As we reveal, the subversions lead to a complex attitude towards architecture and culture in general.

Within this section we brought forward two approaches that react upon the globalization processes. However, it has not become clear in which way both attitudes work. In the final segment we will compare critiques of some of the celebrated works of these approaches. In doing so we could expose their cultural significance.

²⁴ The office's continuous turnover is visible through the many successful independent offices of former employees. OMA spawns include: Zaha Hadid, Ole Scheeren, Joshua Prince-Ramus, Winy Maas, Bjarke Ingels and numerous others. Metropolis Magazine rates OMA to be one of the most influential practices in the world. (Makovsky, 2011)

III. Weighting approaches

Case 1: Luis Barragán

As mentioned earlier the work of Mexican architect Barragán seems to meet the goals of Regionalism successfully. In Mexico Barragán was awarded numerous honours, making him perhaps the most recognized architect of his country. Oddly, his architecture had been largely unappreciated within Mexico during the 1970s. One critique judged his architecture to be '[...] exactly what Mexican architecture shouldn't be'. It is only after a widespread publication that a radical change of perception occurred. This was not a publication of his native country but a catalogue of New York's prestigious Museum of Modern Art. This publication made him famous; it praised his work as being 'so very Mexican'. (Eggener, 2007, 395-407) The critic Jorge Manrique also acclaimed the architect for not simply reviving traditional forms or using characteristic materials. He asserted that while the architecture of Barragán does not make use of Mexican forms and figures, nonetheless it brings about a Mexican flavour. Numerous other critics, both native and foreign, now rate his work as being deeply Mexican in an indirect way.²⁵ Therefore Barragán's architecture is often referred to as being a genuine cultural representation. However, it is evident that several notions are neglected to legitimize this assertion.

Barragán's architecture seems to have an enduring effect on what Mexican architecture is and should be. His legacy is clearly visible in the work of one of Mexico's most successful architects: Ricardo Legorreta. Important to mention is that Legorreta's work is greatly influenced by Barragán and that this success is therefore part of Barragán's legacy. Barragán, who now was being regarded as the dominant example of 'genuine' Mexican architecture, consequently became the reason that other Regionalist experiments never thrived. (Eggener, 2007, 401) One could question the style that is praised. Formally and conceptually, it is directly inspired by Western modern architects.²⁶ This is particularly difficult to accept because it was an American, and therefore biased, publication that seems to have defined what Mexican Regionalism

²⁵ Luis Barragán won one of the most prestigious international architecture awards, the Pritzker Prize. His architecture admired by many, to name a few: Juhani Pallasmaa, Ocatvio Paz, Lawrence Speck, Kenneth Frampton and William Curtis.

²⁶ Western architects such as Le Corbusier, Richard Neutra and Frank Lloyd Wright quite evidently have had strong influences on Barragán. Architectural critic Keith Eggener quite extensively demonstrated their formal and conceptual relations. (Eggener, 1999)

should be. This should remind us of a warning we mentioned earlier. Koolhaas advised that authorities should not endorse an ideology because this is likely to constrain other relevant forces from surfacing. Also Frampton had stated that Regionalism should not endorse one particular style. However, in this particular case we could accept the Modern influence as part of the subjective contemporary blend that is needed for a Regionalist expression. Nevertheless we should not forget that Western concepts are predominant on a global scale²⁷.

This Western predominance also becomes evident when we contemplate the global network's spread towards more tropical and hot climates. It is in the nature of the current market economy to push for optimization. The built culture is therefore strongly influenced by budgetary considerations. (Frampton, 2007, 376) To gain financial certainties corporations usually employ proven methods and that leaves very limited space for experimentation. Even when confronted with new criteria normative plans, installations and building methods are often chosen. Alternatives are labelled as experimental and untested, and within the market economy they are regarded as irrelevant. Koolhaas regretfully calls this over-determination a 'systematic laundering of authentic conditions'. (Koolhaas, 2007, 323) In an interview Koolhaas explains that he does not believe that globalization necessarily implies homogenization. He considers the vast amount of differences as 'an occasion to intervene in different ways and at different levels in a variety of different cultures.' (Gewertz, 1996) This shows that Koolhaas' attitude towards generic architecture is more sophisticated.

Koolhaas even expressed his irritation by mentioning that critics have been 'unbelievably stupid' in the way they interpreted his theories in relation to the work of his office. The critics explained his Lagos investigation²⁸ as a proposition to promote and legitimize the kind of commercial architecture they

²⁷ This ambiguity of cultural exchange is clearly expressed by Aldo van Eyck: 'Western civilization habitually identifies itself with civilization as such on the pontifical assumption that what is not like it is a deviation, less advanced, primitive, or, at best, exotically interesting at a safe distance.' (Eyck, 1962)

²⁸ The documentary 'Lagos/Koolhaas' follows Koolhaas over a period of two years as he investigates Nigeria's capital. The city's rapid urbanization combined with the apparently unplanned nature of its growth has attracted the interest of the architect. The nature of the city is explained following Koolhaas' interpretations. (Sharro, 2006) Koolhaas discusses the city's ability to cope with changing market demands without visible mechanisms.

thought OMA was producing. (Koolhaas, 2007, 348) He explains that his texts, that we have discussed earlier, should be regarded as mere descriptions of the situations that architects are confronted with. (Colomina, 2007, 388) How then does Koolhaas, seemingly a protagonist of the generic, let cultural differences influence his architecture?

Case 2: OMA / Rem Koolhaas

On first sight the Seattle Public Library brutally engages its environment. With a design that consists of folded glass panels in combination with a diagonal blue metal grid OMA's design stands in contrast with its surroundings. Amidst a context of modest rectangular volumes this almost eccentric shape catches the attention. However, the form is all but arbitrary for the buildings' interrelated functions lead to the very particular shape of the building. Before proposing the design Koolhaas' team had researched libraries all across the world. In their analysis of conventional libraries they found that the growth of one function leads to space reduction for another. Usually book spaces take over the more social public spaces. Their findings led OMA's design team to critically look at the repetitive, indistinct spaces of many contemporary libraries. The initial proposal consisted of stacking different volumes, to which programs are allocated. At the same time they took into account the flexibility needed to accommodate future changes in the library's technologies, as well as in its socio-cultural role. By pushing and pulling the stacked programmatic boxes the interior spaces became interconnected. At the same time this cantilevering offered a contextual differentiation leading to more light, views and shade where desired. (Steen, 2004, 99, Buchanan, 2004, Muschamp, 2004, Goldberger, 2004) We could talk endlessly about other ingenious qualities and the general appreciation of the building,²⁹ but these descriptions are only intended to explain in which manner Koolhaas' team has interpreted culture and context.

A first understanding is that the design materialized the way it did thanks to a fruitful collaboration of many participants. We should not only think of the OMA designers, engineers and project managers but also recognize that librarians, publishers, technology experts have been involved in the process from the very start. (Steen, 2004, 97) Opposing the idea of the architect as an all knowing supervisor, Koolhaas

²⁹ The building has been praised at large: The Seattle Times, The New York Times, The New Yorker to name a few critics. Literally countless architectural magazines have extensively acclaimed the building but more importantly, the general public has endorsed it. After seven years, users generally rate the environments 'pleasant and functional'. (Augustin, 2011)

underscores the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration. As he views architecture to formally express and assemble information flows, the previously discussed idea of perception becomes vital. With a collaborative team, which never consists solely of architects, the analysis of OMA's commissions becomes more complex and profound. (Koolhaas, 2007, 347) By involving local parties in the design process the outcome is conceptually more related to its context. In the end the building's shape and materials might not directly relate to its surroundings. In theory this also follows the Regionalist rhetoric, where style is regarded to stand independent of culture.

How then, can its very particular diamond shape with glass curtain walls be justified? We should start to think of the architect's role to blend the contemporary with the contextual.³⁰ The building's large interior spaces seem to create the feeling of a contemporary public cathedral. As we know, Regionalist notions suggested that the contextual should not be bound to a limited interpretation. Instead of introducing yet another material to the city, the building's skin therefore mimics the relatively recent cultural tradition of glass-covered facades. Far from being yet another generic building, the constantly changing building profile can be experienced as reacting to its surroundings. Louis Kahn, celebrate for his culturally sensitive architecture, is quoted to have urged his students to 'ask what the material wants to be'.³¹ With this particular formal expression, one could say that OMA's design seems to show what a structural glass facade can be. In general the building's interior answers to the specific demands of the public functions of the library. Compliant to multidisciplinary analysis, the design facilitates the several public functions through an interlocked spatial model. We could therefore say that its spatial qualities are shaped by an analysis of the necessities of several present sub-cultures.

Discussing other examples would show a repetition of this strategy. We would not recognize formal architectural qualities, but a similar analysis strategy always forecasts a design. The great variation of OMA's architecture is proof to the many variables that play a role in the office's design process. In

³⁰ The new public library of Chicago could be regarded as an example of yet another historically 'correct' building. A few years before the OMA project, Thomas Beeby designed a library that seems vaguely 'like a nineteenth century train station'. Compared to OMA's energetic and contemporary design, this design looks bombastic and overbearing. (Goldberger, 2004, 91)

³¹ As we mentioned earlier, Sullivan thought a design should express the essence of the building's 'function'. Louis Kahn directly relates to this intellectual tradition in his search to express the essence of a material. (Heynen, et al., 2009, 21, 339)

addition to multidisciplinary design analysis Koolhaas explains that domestic forces also determine the political and material terms of a project.³² He comments that in many ways '[...]design is really generated by the different cultures in which they emerged from'. (Koolhaas, 2007, 341)

Formulating an approach

After reviewing both cases an important danger comes to light, namely the favouring of one specific strategy to represent culture. As many critics tell us, Barragán's architecture successfully avoids the stigma of nostalgia through abstraction. In doing so, familiar and culturally coded elements are rendered to be less comprehensible. This abstraction technique seems to be clearly rooted in the aesthetics of the Modern movement. (Cassidy, 2007, 412) Arguably, the strategy of abstraction is bound to be a *temporary* architectural taste. This strategy might lead to satisfying results but we should acknowledge that it is merely *a* method, not *the* method. Nonetheless, architectural historian William Curtis warns us not to trivialize the architecture of Barragán to be a mere fusion of cultural and Modernist elements. Curtis depicts Barragán to be 'genuinely [...] in touch with the tragic vein in Mexican cultural history.' (Curtis, 1996, 498) The other Regionalist examples discussed previously are often praised for the authentic cultural feeling they evoke and or express. More than likely these acknowledged examples are embedded into cultural settings in more than just a formalistic manner. However, in all their variety, these examples often *also* relate to existing traditions directly. Generally, acknowledged Regionalist expressions make use of materials, shapes and colours that remind people of the culture in question.³³

On the other side, the analytical approach that OMA embraces tends to uncover the more subtle constituents of an environment and culture. Koolhaas has often been (mis)quoted for the words "fuck

³² Koolhaas argues that OMA-projects are engaged in their cultural context by involving (dialogue) with local parties. For the Seattle library the office constituted mostly of Americans, and for the Porto concert hall mostly it consisted mostly of Portuguese. Similarly, the Chinese Television Headquarters was developed with 80% Chinese in his office. (Koolhaas, 2007, 341-42)

³³ Architects ranging from Alvar Aalto to Peter Zumthor make use of traditional or local materials. They could be regarded as prime examples for Regionalist expressions.

context.”³⁴ Nevertheless, his office’s strategy creates buildings that *are* embedded in cultural contexts. As Koolhaas seems to have a personal interest in evoking contradictory feelings, his office’s architecture might not always directly relate to existing architectural cultural traditions. Despite this lack of general readability, we pointed out the significance of creative reinterpretations.

From both cases it becomes evident that we cannot pre-select supposedly more pure elements of culture to validate genuine architectural expressions. As both approaches expose and express different constituents of culture, it seems highly subjective to make a judgement of their relative significance. We therefore cannot dismiss one of these attitudes to be more effective for cultural purposes. However, we should reconsider both strategies in relation to the globalization consequences we discussed earlier. These consequences directly relate to the significance of cultural manifestations.

³⁴ Largely misunderstood this remark relates to buildings so big that they would themselves form a context. In a text called ‘Bigness’ Koolhaas describes a building so large that they break ‘with scale, with architectural composition, with tradition, with transparency, with ethics. Bigness is no longer part of any urban tissue. Its subtext is fuck context’ (Buchanan, 2004)

III Mediating between cultures

Defining culture II

As noted in the first section, Saskia Sassen emphasized that the global economic system is embedded in numerous (work) cultures. Additionally, this plurality of cultures can be found *within* globalized cities and regions. As demonstrated the current economic tendency is that internationally operating firms impose their presence on the cities they operate in. This is where we should reconsider both strategies of cultural manifestation in relation to the current global condition we described.

As we have shown, the architecture of OMA does not relate to local culture in a direct way. To some extent it, this strategy can be connected with Deconstructivism. This 'philosophy'²⁰ analyses human theoretical frameworks by reconsidering the experience of external reality in relation to its mental conception. Deconstructivism proposes that reality only exists as an outcome of the interdependence between a subject and its analyzer. We cannot simply perceive reality as it is, because when we perceive something we shape it with our own (biased) understanding of it. By re-allocating the common ground of human experiences to the most elemental impulses Deconstructivism has had an important influence on architectural thinking. It acknowledged that architectural forms, materials and spaces can generate human impulses, but it reaffirmed at the same time that a specific impulse cannot be predicted. In a way it declared that forms, materials and spaces will not produce a specific experience that is shared by all observers. Following that notion our experience of the built environment, or culture for that matter, is linked to so-called discursive formations.³⁵

We will not linger in this philosophical debate but it is crucial to understand that this philosophy proposes that mental formations define our understanding of reality. Correspondently, praising a building

³⁵ Deconstructivism was initiated by thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. As a continuation Michel Foucault explained that knowledge can only be understood in relation to changing contexts, the so called discursive formation. He was critical of meta-theories that introduce an objective explanation of reality. (Radford and Radford, 2005, 71) As mentioned earlier, simply labeling this philosophy as deconstructivism does not do it justice. We should therefore acknowledge its strong relation with post-modern/post-structuralist/post-humanist approaches.

for a particular quality is always subjective. Considering the appreciation is always intrinsically linked to for instance intellectual or cultural associations. The 'Nine Towns' example we discussed earlier is particularly relevant to this notion. The introduced foreign themes are completely disconnected from their original contexts, The citizens of those superficial places will experience them with a completely different discursive formation. The understanding of the built culture can in no way be said to generate the same experience as it did in its original place and time. Following the concept of discursive formations, the discussed 'Nine Towns' example shows quite literally a *meaningless* cultural appropriation.

The lesson to derive from the above is that for the appreciation of formal cultural manifestations to be profound, we should orient ourselves to its interpretation. If we are keen to view culture from a traditional viewpoint, where it is delineated by national and ethnic bounds, we are bound to neglect the current global condition. The globalizing world increasingly makes it possible that products and experiences, ranging from food to religion, can be appropriated by anyone. A so called 'cultural supermarket'. (Mathews, 2007, 47-51) As we have described, cultural borders are becoming more porous. As a consequence, the once self-evident relationship between place, group and culture is disconnected. It becomes clear that insisting on the cultural representation of geographical locations is senseless. Therefore the multi-cultural condition of globalized regions is of great significance for the interpretation of the Regionalist notions.

As we have explained culture to be a collective set of values, it is strongly embedded in a social studies discourse. It consists of a totality of behaviours, beliefs, customs, habits, and knowledge. With this definition of culture, architecture should be grounded on social practices and normative behaviours. Nonetheless, several writers argue that the theoretical debate on cultural expression has often been preoccupied with formalistic constituents. Consequently, the social dimension of a cultural identity has often been underexposed. (Allen, 2007, 422-23, Cassidy, 2007, 418) This social dimension should be a fundamental in creating profound and *meaningful* cultural expressions. In doing so it would remove itself from the subjective nature of formal characteristics. Architecture oriented on local cultural practices would have the intrinsic quality of being culturally sensitive. The final section will further evaluate this proposition.

Cultural expressions respecting the globalized condition

As we have demonstrated, the globalizing world facilitates the appropriation of cultural elements. Additionally we have proved that cultural expression could be rendered shallow through the pitfalls of generalization or superficial quoting. Considering that globalized environments do not consist of homogenous groups it has become more complex to determine and express 'pure' cultures. Furthermore we have seen that thought patterns define our perception, the so-called discursive formations. So even if a culture has been discerned, a cultural expression is limited by its preceptor's interpretation. Considering the above we are almost forced to conclude that creating a genuine and profound cultural expression is nearly impossible in a globalized condition.

Yet this is not the case if, as suggested at the end of the previous section, we orient ourselves to the social dimension of cultures. As Neil Leach points out, architecture could derive its meaning from the social activities it allows. An analysis should identify and interpret the specific circular relationship between a place and its culture, in relation to the actions and behaviours it allows. (Allen, 2007, 423) This social strategy would help to identify and show the presence of different cultural groups within a globalized region. For the record, it seems that both OMA and the Regionalists are engaged in the social settings of their commissions. Their approach does differ in the use of formal means, considering that OMA's architecture does not necessarily use elements of the embedded built traditions. In a globalized condition this seems to become less important for experience ultimately takes place in the mind of the observer.

With the idea of perception in mind, some materials, shapes and spaces are intrinsically bound to be experienced a certain way. As argued earlier, human sensory characteristics allow for specific experiences regardless of culture. These sensory impulses might be understood differently, nonetheless architects could introduce a form of narrative to co-relate them into a specific experience. Well aware of the globalized conditions, Klingmann therefore intelligently suggest the idea of architecture as a form of choreography. 'The architect as choreographer sets the stage (architecture), determines the plot (activities), and guides the actors (users) through a sequencing of situations and events.' For this choreography to work an ongoing dialogue with all the parties should be maintained. Therefore the architects' role is to envision a 'scenario' that is open to accommodate multiple interests without losing an overall objective. (Klingmann, 2007, 314) Architecture should work as a dynamic choreographed composition that balances spatial properties with expected culture-sensitive use patterns.

Conclusion

As we have shown a conscious attitude towards the built environment is vital in a globalizing world. Through multidisciplinary analysis architecture could acknowledge and respond to specific socio-cultural demands. A sensitive display of cultural heritage through formal means can meet familiar frameworks more directly. However, the culturally globalizing, and therefore blending, state of the world brings in the important notion of perception. As homogenous cultural groups can hardly be pointed out, architecture should acknowledge its subjective formal nature. On the other end we pointed out that sensory human impulses *can* be used to generate an experience. The essay therefore ends with the suggestion to produce architecture in a narrative way, open to interpretation but defined by dynamic cultural practices and demands. This engagement towards specific socio-cultural practices should be the defining factor if we are to judge the profoundness culture-sensitive expressions.

The discussion could continue on the formal means that can create culture-sensitive experiences. We have demonstrated that contemporary cultures are intertwined in a complex way. However, if subculture-specific associations are exposed, architects could specifically use formal means to evoke experiences. These findings would be especially meaningful for the multi-cultural state of globalized regions.

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