

CADERNOS
PROARQ 43

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Crossed Glances: Architecture and Criticism astride Geographies

Olhares cruzados: arquitetura e crítica a atravessar geografias

Miradas cruzadas: arquitectura y crítica a través de las geografías

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Resumo

O oceano Atlântico não é simplesmente uma grande extensão de água que separa as margens da Europa das margens das Américas: é uma área de contato que divide e une ao mesmo tempo, uma esfera epistemológica que contém conhecimento, expertise, ideias, bem como opiniões compartilhadas ou contestadas. Conexões transatlânticas produziram e continuam a produzir efeitos duradouros nas partes envolvidas; porém, de muitas maneiras, também criaram um 'espaço intermediário', um território independente que transcende a qualidade das mensagens transmitidas e seus efeitos sobre a cultura receptora. Ao tomar o oceano Atlântico como um território metafórico, este texto pretende refletir metodologicamente sobre a natureza transnacional de inúmeras discussões arquitetônicas que surgiram durante os séculos XIX e XX. De fato, arquiteturas não são apenas a manifestação material de uma disciplina e cultura profissional de longa data, mas também o resultado de discursos que se originam localmente, porém são frequentemente disseminados – e desenvolvidos – em escala global. Entendida como um instrumento de mediação entre diferentes atores envolvidos na concepção, na construção, mas também no uso da arquitetura, a crítica é de fato um elemento chave das redes de contatos e mecanismos de intercâmbio que definem os diálogos transatlânticos. Propagada por viagens, migração, difusão de imagens e tradução de palavras, a arquitetura é um veículo para a transmissão de valores culturais entre pequenos círculos tanto de especialistas e quanto de intelectuais, e em tal medida que afeta grandes segmentos do chamado 'público em geral'. Este ensaio tem por objetivo discutir as implicações da disseminação de ideias arquitetônicas, de acordo com uma perspectiva que vai além da transatlântica e que toma o espaço divisório do oceano como uma metáfora para relações culturais cruzadas. Sejam transatlânticos, transnacionais ou globais, os 'diálogos' arquitetônicos implicam uma confrontação de diferentes pontos de vista: a história que deles emerge é, portanto, baseada tanto em trocas factuais quanto em olhares cruzados.

Palavras-chave: Arquitetura. História da arquitetura. Relações transculturais. Trocas transatlânticas.

Abstract

The Atlantic Ocean is not simply the large expanse of water that separates the shores of Europe from those of the Americas: it is an area of contact that at once divides and unites, an epistemological sphere that contains knowledge, expertise, ideas, as well as shared or disputed opinions. Transatlantic connections have produced and continue to produce lasting effects on the involved parties; but, in many ways, they have also created a 'space in-between', an independent territory that transcends the quality of the transmitted messages and their effects on the receiving culture. Taking the Atlantic Ocean as a metaphorical territory, this text intends to reflect methodologically on the transnational nature of numerous architectural discussions that emerged during the 19th and 20th centuries. Indeed, architectures are not only the material manifestation of a long-standing discipline and professional culture, but also the outcome of discourses that originate locally but are often disseminated – and evolved – at a global scale. Understood as an instrument of mediation between different actors involved in the conception, construction and use of architecture, criticism is, in fact, a key constituent of the networks of contacts and mechanisms of exchange that define transatlantic dialogues. Propagated by travel, emigration, diffusion of images and translation of words, architecture is a vehicle for the transmission of cultural values, both within small circles of experts and intellectuals and to an extent that affects large segments of the so-called 'general public'. This essay aims to illuminate the implications of the dissemination of architectural ideas, according to a perspective that goes beyond the transatlantic one and that takes the Atlantic Ocean's divide as a metaphor for cross-cultural relations. Whether transatlantic, transnational or global, architectural 'dialogues' imply the confrontation of different points of view: the history that emerges from them is, therefore, one that is based as much on factual exchanges as it is on crossed glances.

Keywords: Architecture. History of architecture. Architectural criticism. Cross-cultural relations. Transatlantic exchanges.

Resumen

El Océano Atlántico no es simplemente la vasta extensión de agua que separa las costas de Europa de las de América: es un área de contacto que divide y une al mismo tiempo, una esfera epistemológica que contiene conocimiento, experiencia, ideas, así como opiniones compartidas o disputadas. Las conexiones transatlánticas han producido y siguen produciendo efectos duraderos en las partes involucradas; pero, de muchas maneras, también han creado un 'espacio intermedio', un territorio independiente que trasciende la calidad de los mensajes transmitidos y sus efectos en la cultura receptora. Tomando el Océano Atlántico como un territorio metafórico, este texto pretende reflexionar metodológicamente sobre la naturaleza transnacional de numerosas discusiones arquitectónicas que surgieron durante los siglos XIX y XX. En efecto, las arquitecturas no son solo la manifestación material de una disciplina y cultura profesional de larga data, sino también el resultado de discursos que se originan localmente pero que a menudo se difunden – y evolucionan – a escala global. Entendida como un instrumento de mediación entre los diferentes actores involucrados en la concepción, construcción y uso de la arquitectura, la crítica es, de hecho, un componente clave de las redes de contactos y mecanismos de intercambio que definen los diálogos transatlánticos. Propagada por medio de viajes, emigración, difusión de imágenes y traducción de palabras, la arquitectura es un vehículo para la transmisión de valores culturales, tanto dentro de pequeños círculos de expertos e intelectuales como en un grado que afecta a grandes segmentos del denominado 'público general'. Este ensayo tiene como objetivo discutir las implicaciones de la difusión de ideas arquitectónicas, desde una perspectiva que va más allá de lo transatlántico y toma e, la división del océano como una metáfora de las relaciones interculturales. Ya sean transatlánticos, transnacionales o globales, los 'diálogos' arquitectónicos implican la confrontación de diferentes puntos de vista: la historia que surge de ellos es, por lo tanto, una basada tanto en intercambios fácticos como en miradas cruzadas.

Palabras clave: Arquitectura. Historia de la arquitectura. Crítica arquitectónica. Relaciones transculturales. Intercambios transatlánticos.

Not long ago, while reading some short stories by Argentinian writer Osvaldo Soriano, an author probably best known for the novel *Triste, solitario y final*, I learned of the existence of the city of Cipolletti. Located in the Patagonian province of Río Negro, Cipolletti is one of the locations described by Soriano as the places of his childhood and boyhood, small cities and towns of Argentina's immense province where his father's work had brought him and his family (SORIANO, 1996). Filled with curiosity, I immediately wondered why Cipolletti has such an Italian-sounding name.

The city of Cipolletti was named after Italian engineer Cesare Cipolletti, a hydraulics specialist who is remembered for having built toward the end of the 19th century the dams over the Mendoza and Tunuyán rivers and, more importantly, for having designed a vast irrigation system around the Limay, Neuquén, Río Negro and Colorado rivers, only partially realized. Born in Rome and educated in the same city, while in Italy Cipolletti also directed, among others, the works for the construction of Florence's aqueduct and those for the Villoresi canal, the latter destined to connect the Ticino and Adda rivers in Lombardy (D'AQUINO, 1981).

What caught my attention, though, was the retrievable data about Cipolletti's birth and death: most sources indicate "Rome 1843" and "Atlantic Ocean 1908" as the places and dates of his birth and death. Indeed, Cipolletti died aboard the ocean liner 'Tomaso di Savoia', in navigation from Genoa to South America, when the vessel was around the Canarias and while the engineer was returning to Argentina to complete works commissioned by the local government: I have not found precise information about this, but it seems likely that he had been buried at sea.[1]

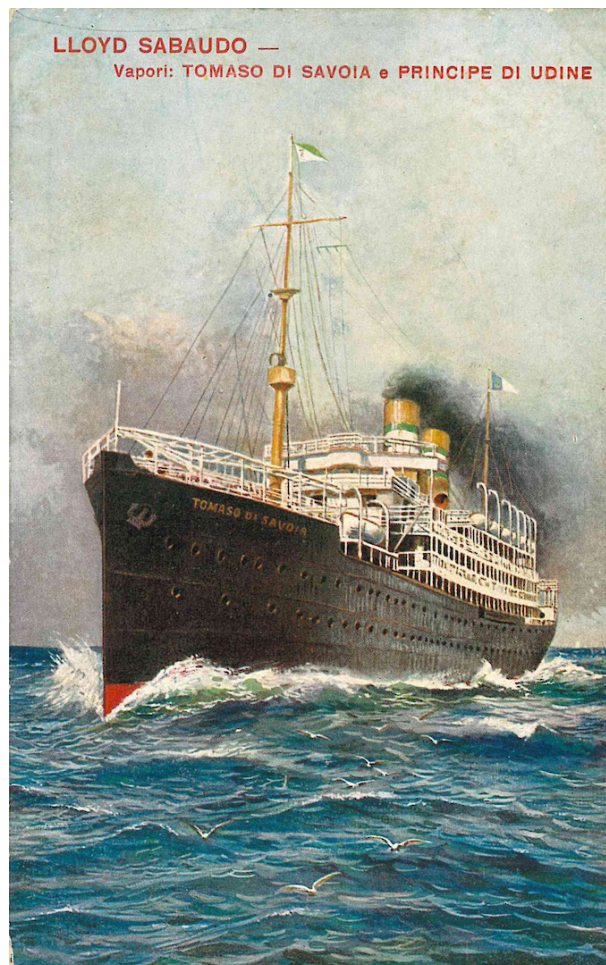


FIGURE 1 – The ocean liner
"Tomaso di Savoia".

Source: personal collection.

Cipolletti's life and death could not be more symbolic. As an actor of the transatlantic exchange, the bearer of (technical) knowhow transferred back and forth between Europe and the Americas, the champion of an expertise that could be applied in places so distant one from the other, he literally died in the middle of the two geographies he had contributed to intellectually connect. The ocean somewhat swallowed up his remains as well as his knowledge, becoming both his resting place and the emblem of a rich and successful process of transfer.

I started with Cipolletti's case precisely because of the symbolism it carries. Cesare Cipolletti's life and decease, in fact, remind us that the Atlantic Ocean is not simply the large expanse of water that separates the shores of Europe from those of the Americas: it is rather an area of contact that at once divides and unites, an epistemological sphere that contains knowledge, expertise, ideas, as well as shared or disputed opinions. Transatlantic connections have produced and continue to produce lasting effects on those who are involved; yet, in many ways, they have also created a 'space in-between', an independent territory that transcends the quality of the transmitted messages and their effects on the receiving culture.

This text takes the Atlantic Ocean as a metaphorical territory with the goal to embark on a methodological reflection about the transnational nature of numerous architectural discussions that emerged during the 19th and 20th centuries. It also aims at establishing some departure points for the debate that this collection of essays intends to foster. As a matter of fact, architectures are not only the material manifestation of a long-standing discipline and professional culture, but also the outcome of discourses that originate locally but are often disseminated – and evolved – at a global scale. And, if understood as an instrument of mediation between different actors involved in the conception, construction and use of architecture, criticism – the central subject of this volume – is a key constituent of the networks of contacts and of the mechanisms of exchange that define the so-called 'transatlantic dialogues'.

As it happens, these dialogues were fueled over the years by manifold phenomena, since the mobility of architectural culture was not always the exclusive result of the movement of individuals. The experience of architects, engineers or any professional whose activity was linked to construction often traveled along somewhat autonomous itineraries and with various means of transport, material as well as virtual. And with the experience of the designers and practitioners, one must remember, it was also the experience of the users that travelled, insofar as perceptions and expectations about architecture were shaped at once by local conditions and circulated knowledge.

We do know that among the different modes of circulation of professional knowhow that have characterized the history of architecture during the last centuries, one is certainly the diffusion of printed materials that propagated information on construction techniques, on design solutions and on aesthetic options to audiences composed of specialists and laypersons. Books and treatises, of course, had begun to acquire a prominent status within Western architectural culture since the Renaissance, when volumes such as Leon Battista Alberti's *De re aedificatoria* or Vitruvius's *De architectura* started to make their appearance on the architectural scene: however, the novelty that characterized the 19th and 20th centuries (even if the symptoms of change could already be detected at the end of the 18th century) was the level of distribution of these materials, favored by a larger editorial production but also by an expanded demand and a greater spending power among readers.

At the turn of the 19th century, thanks to the growing circulation of books and periodicals, specialized publications began to propagate technical and professional knowledge internationally. A fundamental contribution to the success of these texts consisted in being based on visual apparatuses capable of overcoming linguistic barriers and of creating a sort of lingua franca accepted beyond national borders.

The best example comes from books such as *Recueil et parallèle des édifices de tout genre, anciens et modernes* by Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand (1800), *Eléments et Théorie de l'architecture* by Julien Guadet (1894), or *Histoire de l'architecture* by Auguste Choisy (1899), all volumes that became a standard reference for architectural students in Europe and the Americas at least until the 1920s.

All richly illustrated (Choisy's *Histoire de l'architecture* included some 1,700 images), these publications suggested a universalistic understanding of architecture, one where general principles of construction or composition were offered to a multinational and multilingual public of apprenticing architects. Choisy's use of axonometric projections, for example, facilitated the transmission of his pedagogical message, reducing the drawings almost to the value of diagrams. Similar considerations could be made for the success of the scholarly work of Liang Sicheng, often considered one of the 'fathers' of China's modern architecture, who in his publications made available from the 1930s onwards utilized Western-imported techniques of representation, with which he had become familiar while studying in the United States, to document traditional Chinese architecture to local audiences (LI, 2002).

However, the circulation of printed materials is not the focus of this text. In fact, the dissemination of books and other publication outlets – for example journals – triggered problems of reception, many of which still require a thorough analysis. These problems related to the role of mediation played by particular actors, linked to the specific agendas carried by the actors themselves, as well as by those who acted on the receiving end. Moreover, they revolved around distinct geographies, places that became – borrowing an expression introduced by Petra Ceferin and Cvetka Požar (CEFERIN, POŽAR, 2008) – *epicenters* of architectural production, carrying identified and identifiable features and being recognized, at a certain point in time, as responding to the problems faced in given contexts.

In many ways, epicenters can also be defined as areas of overlapping interests and actions. The notion of 'contact zone', elaborated during the 1990s by literary and cultural historian Mary Louise Pratt and recently applied to the field of architectural studies by Tom Avermaete and Cathelijne Nuijsink, might be of use for the discussion on transatlantic cultural dialogues developed by this collection of essays (PRATT, 1991; PRATT, 1992; AVERMAETE, NUIJSINK, 2021). For Pratt, whose background centered on the study of colonial settings, the 'contact zone' is the place where previously separated cultures come together. Her approach to the subject intended to challenge an understanding of the relations between center and periphery most often based on a generalized assumption: that centers tend to understand themselves as determining the peripheries, and rarely the other way around. Contact zones, Pratt argued, are spaces of encounter characterized by what she called the 'interactive, improvisational' dimension of the exchange (PRATT, 1991, p. 37).

What should be highlighted of Pratt's argument is that within these encounters, spoken and written forms of communication produce dialogues, collaborations, mediations, appropriations, new expressions, as well as criticism, but also incomprehensions, miscomprehensions, and a heterogeneity of meanings – aspects on which it is important to insist. Indeed, talking of contacts and dialogues brings us to raise the issue of reception. The circulation of information that results from the dissemination of books and other printed materials triggers problems concerning how messages are received, primarily because of the challenging passage from one cultural context to another and, more specifically, from and to diverse linguistic environments. In the transition from language to language, for example, alterations of the original content and partial shifts in meaning frequently occur, a phenomenon that calls into question the 'common' ground on which dialogues between architectural cultures allegedly take place.

When it comes to the movement of culture and knowledge beyond national barriers, these themes have been discussed in various scholarly realms, including sociology of education. In a text published in 2002 on the circulation of ideas, Pierre Bourdieu questioned the simplistic notion of intellectual life as ‘spontaneously international’, that is, free from prejudice, stereotypes and clichés (BOURDIEU, 2002). According to Bourdieu, international exchanges are intrinsically subject to ‘structural factors’ that generate misunderstandings: the most important of them relates to the fact that knowledge circulates outside its original context (what Bourdieu calls ‘le champ d’origine’) and is reinterpreted in relation to the structure of its host field (‘le champ d’accueil’), mainly because of the loss of its original meaning and function.

Translation can therefore be understood as the act of translating a text from one language into another as well as the transfer and adaptation from different cultural contexts of the notions or ideas it contains. Thus, the activity of translation involves addressing important questions regarding the capacity of reception by new readers and the need to adapt texts (and, in general, information) to new cultural environments. As scholar of comparative literature Susan Bassnett points out, translations usually serve different purposes (BASSNETT-MCGUIRE, 1980): for example, they imply some form of mediation between the cultural environments from which the original source comes and those of the reader; and they generate a phenomenon of selection, since only a part of the available knowledge is translated and since the choice of what is actually translated reflects existing social and cultural rules.

The history of modern architecture provides plenty of illustrations of adaptive translation and transformative reception of specialized texts, of literary operations marked by a critical selection and a crucial mediation of original contents. The best known is certainly the case of the English edition of *Vers une architecture*, Le Corbusier’s first publishing success, whose 1927 translation into English by Frederick Etchells produced a parallel interpretation of the Swiss-French architect’s thinking into the English-speaking world, one that was rectified only in 2007 when the Getty Research Institute released a new translation by John Goodman, accompanied by an essay by Jean-Louis Cohen (COHEN, 2007).

It is important to keep in mind that the substantial revisions that often characterized translated texts sometimes mirrored distinctive historical junctures, when concepts conveyed by published materials acquired a new sense once transported into a new context. For example, the translation into Italian of Lewis Mumford’s *The Culture of Cities* sums up many of these issues. Published in English before the war, the volume reached Italy’s readers only in 1953, showing little relation with the 1937 original (ROSSO, SCRIVANO, 1999). Partly rewritten by the author, partly adapted by its translator, the book now responded to the specificities of both the postwar world and the Italian context, being updated with recent and contemporary examples and adapted to the publisher’s current social and political agenda (the publishing house, called Edizioni di Comunità, was owned by industrialist turned progressive politician Adriano Olivetti).

Another eminent example of how a book was heavily affected by its transposition in a new cultural setting is the ‘case’ of Aldo Rossi’s *L’Architettura della Città*, a text whose various international translations appeared at a considerable distance of time from the original Italian and with significant shifts in meaning. Rossi’s international translators faced several challenges in rendering his highly allusive and metaphorical language into different idioms – a consideration that could be extended to the various translations of Manfredo Tafuri’s books into different languages, and that perhaps can be used to explain, at least in part, the reasons of Tafuri’s international success. [2]

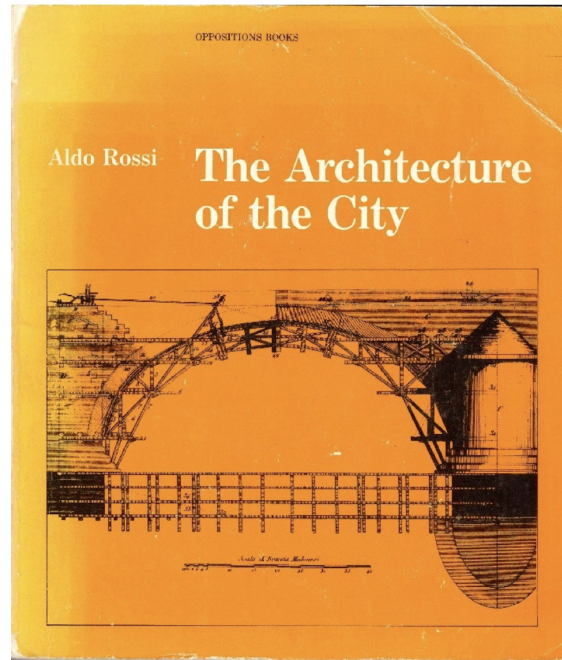


FIGURE 2 – Cover of Aldo Rossi's *The Architecture of the City*.

Source: ROSSI, Aldo. **The architecture of the city**. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982.

Numerous passages in the English edition of *L'Architettura della Città* bear witness to this (ROSSI, 1982). For instance, Rossi's recurrent use of the Italian expression 'fatto urbano' related to his own view of the city as a stratification of social, cultural and morphological events, playing with the double meaning of the Italian word 'fatto', both 'fact', something that exists in reality, and the past participle of the verb 'fare', 'to make'; it also derived from the adaptation of the French 'fait urbain', the evidence of Rossi's well-known familiarity with transalpine authors like the urbanist Marcel Poète and the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. In the English version, 'fatto urbano' became 'urban artifact', an astute adaptation on the part of the translators but also a passage that, inevitably, rendered only in some measure the full meaning of the original expression. In short, the crux confronted across the Atlantic Ocean only reflected the major problem that, normally, affects translations: the difficulty to render a concept in another linguistic, and therefore conceptual, territory. It should come to no surprise that the locution 'fatto urbano' is expressed in eight different ways in *L'Architettura della Città*'s 1973 German edition (PELLNITZ, 2014).

It is evident that these 'deviations' – if we can call them this way – of the original messages in the passage from one context to another did not concern exclusively the translations of texts: they were (and are) as well common to the cultural translation of visual materials, since this passage implies the adaptation of exported knowledges to environments characterized by different 'reading tools' and by different social and ethnic sensibilities. But translations – not simply textual, but also of concepts and ideas – establish and reflect power relations between the various involved parties, between the conditions found in the place of origin and those on the receiving end.

The career of Italian critic and historian Bruno Zevi, otherwise well investigated in relation to his historiographical contributions, can be interpreted as a project of construction of social and political legitimacy – in particular, upon his return to Italy in July 1944 from his American exile, with the Second World War being still fought in Europe. Dressing the clothes of the cultural mediator, in the postwar years Zevi pursued an agenda – perhaps only partially achieved – of cultural hegemony, for example by placing his persona at the center of a web of transatlantic connections and depicting himself as an essential point of contact between different architectural worlds; he also presented himself as a prime advocate for cultural change (DULIO,

2008; SCRIVANO, 2013, pp. 83-94). Zevi did not hesitate to resort to various forms of manipulation in his effort **to push himself into the limelight** of transatlantic dialogues, for instance by circulating photographic images – like one taken on the occasion of the ceremony in Venice for the conferral to Frank Lloyd Wright of a degree *honoris causa* – where he is depicted facing the American architect alone: upon a closer examination, one can see that a coat of dark ink has effaced the presence of a surrounding crowd (SCRIVANO, 2021).

From the 1950s onwards, Zevi positioned himself at a central junction of the itineraries of international dissemination of architectural information, reaching widespread reputation thanks to the circulation of his writings [3]. By the mid-1960s, a seminal text such as his *Saper vedere l'architettura* had already been translated into English, Spanish, Hebrew, Slovenian, French, Hungarian, and Croatian. The case of the reception of Zevi's work in Latin America provides a good illustration of the international readerships' early access to his work – as much as it invites scholars to embark on researching a subject that remains, for the most part, little known (Zevi's first writing for Latin American audiences appeared in Argentina in 1952, when a volume titled *Duas conferencias* was published by the University of Buenos Aires).

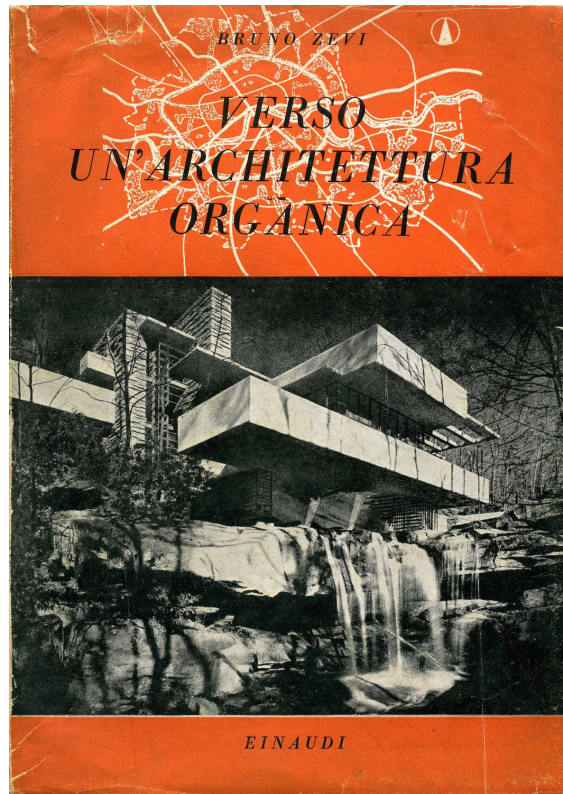


FIGURE 3 – Cover of Bruno Zevi's *Saper Vedere l'architettura*.

Source: ZEVI, Bruno. *Verso un'architettura organica. Saggio sullo sviluppo del pensiero architettonico negli ultimi cinquant'anni*. Turin: Einaudi, 1945.

As historian and theorist Dipesh Chakrabarty has written in the second edition of his *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, a volume devoted to the debate on postcolonialism, rather than always leading to a mediation or, on the contrary, to a complete absence of communication, the transfer of information (and the consequent translation of it) often determines a connection between 'dominant forms of knowledge' marked by the coming to the fore of 'partially opaque relationships' (CHAKRABARTY, 2008, pp. 83-86) – sometimes with surprising results, one could add.

The so-called 'Brazilian Style' in West Africa was the outcome of multiple actions of cultural translation of styles and aesthetic preferences, within which the terms

'dominant' and 'dominated' seem to be repeatedly switching their respective attributions. The arrival of former slaves from Brazil (some emancipated, some expelled) to the African continent during the 19th century led to the adoption of building types and decorative solutions that hybridized Portuguese colonial architecture in South America. The moldings, the sliding doors, the wrought-iron gates, the pastel colors of the façades, and even the mosques that imitated the baroque churches of Bahia, like the Grand Mosque of Porto Novo, in Benin, were testimony not only of the intricate interlacements existing between European, South American, and African cultures, but also of the complex relationship that resulted from the translation of the visual imageries and technical skills that accompanied them (HALLEN, DE BENEDETTI, 1988).

The above-mentioned example calls attention to the fact that power relations affecting the dissemination of architectural models do not simply concern individuals, such as practitioners and building specialists, but also entire social groups. In this respect, the processes of circulation, translation and adaptation of architectural knowledge can also be viewed from a perspective that links them to the creation of new frameworks of formal, visual and stylistic expectations. As Pierre Bourdieu illustrated in *La Distinction*, a 1979 work dedicated precisely to the social construction of the aesthetic judgment, there is a close correspondence between the formation of class structures and the production of taste (BOURDIEU, 1979).

Taste and aesthetic opinion participate in a cultural conflict whose aim is the control of social space through an 'accumulation of cultural capital', as Bourdieu writes, while dominant social groups implement strategies of distinction by defining and trying to impose a 'legitimate' aesthetic sensibility, or *bon goût*, good taste. The implications of Bourdieu's argument for the study of phenomena of circulation, translation and adaptation of architecture are relevant: to some extent, the diffusion of architectural knowledge does depend on the successful or unsuccessful implementation of these strategies of distinction. In the same way, as a byproduct of the competition between social groups, aesthetic judgment can be a factor of both integration and exclusion: in their movements between different cultural contexts, formal, visual and stylistic expectations are defined by the social conflicts of the contexts themselves, via mechanisms of both appropriation and rejection.

In the example of early 19th century America, the discussions about aesthetics applied to institutional as well as civilian buildings were mostly co-opted from Europe's contemporaneous debate over new styles. [4] Around the 1820s, Germany had been

FIGURE 4 – Richard Upjohn,
Bowdoin College Chapel,
Brunswick, Maine, 1844-1855.

Source: courtesy of
the George J. Mitchell
Department of Special
Collections & Archives,
Bowdoin College Library,
Brunswick, Maine.



at the center of a revival in mural painting, often of Romanesque derivation, which had materialized in novel currents in architectural design: mural painting was then exported to America by immigrated German painters and architects, as part of a much larger trend that saw German Romanesque style influencing American building activity (CURRAN, 1999).

These and other imports into the United States, however, had ample reverberations, sparking at times significant controversy. A short novel published by Edgar Allan Poe in 1840, titled *The Business Man (Peter Pendulum)*, portrays with great accuracy America's mood in terms of architectural taste around the mid-19th century. It describes the harassment of wealthy city residents through the threat of erecting neighboring buildings in 'inappropriate' styles – “[...] an ornamental mud hovel [...]; or a Down-East or Dutch Pagoda, or a pig-sty, or an ingenious little bit of fancy work, either Esquimau, Kickapoo, or Hottentot,” Poe writes (POE, 1856, p. 331). In the writer's fictional description, these constructions are to be demolished only upon proper payment. Poe's ironic “Eye-Sore trade” (as he calls it) testifies to the slow diffusion of new aesthetic tendencies (those of 19th-century historicism, for example) and, more importantly from my point of view, unveils the consolidation of different forms of taste together with the not-so-subtle resistances this consolidation often faced. [5]



FIGURE 5 – The Wedding Cake House, Kennebunk, Maine, 1825 ca.

Source: photograph by the author.

If you will, the above-described examples of dissemination of design and building practices as well as of consolidation of aesthetic preferences depict an interplay between ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultures, the same interplay exemplified by the case of the Brazilian village of Galópolis, in the outskirts of the city of Caxias do Sul, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Galópolis took the name from a businessman called Ercole Gallò (originally from Biella, in Northern Italy, a silk and wool industry center since the 17th century), who established a woolen mill in proximity of a creek (BUENO, 2012). If the entrepreneur was a Piedmontese, the group of workers that formed the labor force was composed by immigrants from Veneto, by and large from Schio, a town near Vicenza where around the 1870s industrialist Alessandro Rossi had inaugurated one of Italy's first workers' villages.



FIGURE 6 – Workers' village in Galópolis, Caxias do Sul, Rio Grande do Sul, end of 19th century.

Source: photograph by the author.

While the workers' degree of participation in the construction of the houses they went on to occupy once they moved to Brazil might be difficult to prove, one is left wondering whether the familiarity with specific housing typologies, on the part of the future occupants, had played a role in determining the ultimate design result [6]. The case of Galópolis seems to prove that, alongside a 'high' end approach practiced by intellectual and professional elites, there existed a 'low' end attitude, one where users and inhabitants rose to the rank of protagonists of the process of dissemination or cultural assimilation of building types.

If the circulation of information pertaining to architecture contributes to raising social and cultural expectations, it also participates in the construction of imaginaries and mythologies. For sure, the most powerful among the myths that have fueled the transatlantic exchanges is that of America. It is not by chance that Jean-Louis Cohen, in his pioneering works on the dissemination of American culture and its impact on European architecture during the 20th century (of which the volume *Scenes of the World to Come* is the most famous), hinged exactly on the mechanisms of mythification to draw his famous distinction between Americanism and Americanization (COHEN, 1995). For Cohen, while Americanization is the name given to a profound social process both shaped by the postwar political and economic hegemony of the United States and characterized by the effective transfer of policies, products, modes of production and consumption – often implying the material engagement of American business or government activities –, Americanism, dealing primarily with the transfer of images and models expressing particular desires and expectations, functioned thanks to the construction of an imagery, both indirect (based on the circulation of books, journals, photographs, films) and first-hand (when visitors and travelers reported their own experiences of the New World).

Myths gave often rise to aversion and disapproval: the history of Americanism is also the history of its opposite, anti-Americanism, a sentiment that has survived the times and that persists today. From the years of the anxieties provoked by the verticality of

New York City and Chicago or the mixed reception that accompanied the introduction of Fordism and Taylorism, anti-Americanism has been the reaction to a change perceived as eroding values deemed immutable. However, this oppositional stance rests on the confusion in not recognizing Cohen's distinction, that is, in not separating the *soft power* of the myth from the dynamics of geo-politics.

In a book published in 2017 and titled *Civilisation. Comment nous sommes devenus américains* (Civilization: How we Became Americans), former revolutionary turned writer and philosopher Régis Debray equates Americanization with globalization, attributing to this conflated category most of the evils of the contemporary world (DEBRAY, 2017). Imagining the transformations that have marked his native France since the end of the Second World War as if he were someone who had awakened from a long period of hibernation – the text evokes the character interpreted by comedian Louis de Funès in the 1969 motion picture *Hibernatus* – Debray espouses an almost apocalyptic view of the transatlantic (and, by extension, transnational) exchange: “Tout nomadise, tout se croise, tout se diffuse, [...], mais tout ne vas pas partout” (Everything is nomadic, everything crosses paths, everything spreads, [...], but not everything goes everywhere), he writes in one of the book's passages (DEBRAY, 2017, p. 16).

Debray's words perhaps descend from the uncertainties that mark the present time and from a feeling of anxiety that undermines the existing universes of values. A sense of anxiety that has, nevertheless, given way to various reflections on the problematic relationship that links the concept of locality to that of globality. For example, it was precisely from the observation of the current processes of globalization, and of the 'return to nationalism' that arose as a reaction to them, that the French philosopher and sinologist François Jullien developed in his 2016 book *Il n'y a pas d'identité culturelle. Mais nous défendons les ressources d'une culture* (There is no Cultural Identity: But we defend the Resources of a Culture) a critique to the notion of cultural identity, supporting instead the need for a balance between principles of universality and the defense of singularities through new notions of 'cultural resource' (JULLIEN, 2016).

In the title of this essay, I use the expression 'crossed glances'. I derive it from the *Carnets du voyage en Chine*, a book published in 2009 that collects the notes taken by philosopher and semiologist Roland Barthes during a trip to China that took place in 1974 (BARTHES, 2009). The book does not simply chronicle the journey undertaken with other French left-leaning intellectuals – Julia Kristeva, Philippe Sollers, Marcelin Pleyne, and François Wahl, among other – but it also offers a series of reflections on the question of cultural exchange and, more importantly, on the exploration of the 'other', on the looking at realities that appear so distant from those of the observer.

In the *Carnets*, Barthes confesses his partial sense of loss, describing his discovery of China as marked by an 'opacité complète', a sort of 'total opacity'. This is quite an interesting remark coming from a semiologist, particularly from someone trained at analyzing and interpreting signs, the same author who had published in 1970 the much-celebrated *L'Empire des signes* (The Empire of Signs) dedicated to Japanese culture seen through the eyes of a European (BARTHES, 1970). Barthes's notes seem to be struggling in sorting out problems of understanding and interpretation: “Un bon regard est un regard qui louche”, he writes at one point, “a good look is a cross-eyed one” (BARTHES, 2009, p. 196).

I am not implying that any exploration of 'transatlantic dialogues' is characterized by the difficulties Barthes experienced in China. The study of the processes of cultural exchange, together with the actual, proven and demonstrable, transfer of information (and related problems, of course), must, however, also take into account the projections of views and images, concrete as well as ideal, that individuals or groups of people might produce or be subject to. And, since we are talking of 'projections', we must accept too the possibility that shadows, clouds or blurs exist.

Propagated by travel, emigration, diffusion of images and translation of words, architecture is a vehicle for the transmission of cultural values, both within small circles of experts and intellectuals and to an extent that affects large segments of the so-called 'general public' (JANNIÈRE, SCRIVANO, 2020). Whether transatlantic, transnational or global, architectural 'dialogues' imply the confrontation of different points of view: the history that emerges from them is, therefore, one that is based as much on factual exchanges as it is on crossed glances.

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