Design Exchanges in Mid-Twentieth Century Buenos Aires

The Programme Parque Almirante Brown and its Process of Creative Appropriation

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Summary

This article offers a critical analysis of planning and housing design in mid-twentieth century Buenos Aires, Argentina, within the wider global context of modern design and architecture. In particular, the article focuses on an urban development programme, Parque Almirante Brown (PAB), and on its design perspectives towards slums, shantytowns and social housing. The PAB creatively intertwined elements from different design and planning traditions, including urban design approaches fostered by the *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM).

This article argues that the way in which the PAB incorporated these approaches implied a selection of concepts that responded to the government's political agenda. In other words, it was only through their intersection with local political anxieties that international design ideas were materialised in the actual design of the programme. Specifically with regard to informal settlements, the PAB followed modern architecture conceptions based on slum clearance. Simultaneously, it filtered-out those ideas which celebrated the vernacular, registered positive aspects in slum life, or granted agency to grassroots groups. Thus, despite contemporaneous discussions which engaged with bottom-up participation, such as those of the Team 10, the PAB ultimately proposed the eradication of the shantytowns and the forceful displacement of their inhabitants.

Keywords: Buenos Aires, housing design, modernism, Parque Almirante Brown, urban design, vernacular

Introduction

This article offers a critical analysis of planning and housing design in mid-twentieth century Buenos Aires, Argentina, within the wider global context of modern design and architecture. In particular, the article focuses on an urban development programme, Parque Almirante Brown (PAB; literally 'Admiral Brown Park'), and on its design perspectives towards slums, shantytowns and social housing. The argument is developed in a twofold manner. First, it is proposed that the PAB creatively intertwined elements from different design and planning traditions, while simultaneously representing a culmination of the local debate concerning the use of the South West of Buenos Aires. More specifically, the PAB embraced high-modernist urban design approaches inspired by the *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM; International Congresses of Modern Architecture), as well as incorporating elements of inter-American planning discourse as promoted in specialised meetings and conferences during the 1950s.

Second, the article contends that the way in which the PAB incorporated elements from the cited approaches implied an important work of selection and filtering out of concepts, which was in line with the national government's agenda. In other words, while the PAB engaged with international discussions of urban and housing design, it was only the intersection of these with local political anxieties that led to the actual design of the programme. Regarding informal settlements specifically, the PAB followed conceptions originally promoted both by the Athens Charter (the key document condensing the views of the early CIAM) and by inter-American planning discussions which entailed slum clearance and zoning for modern housing and urban development. At the same time, PAB housing design engaged with select architectural features inspired by the modern architecture of the contemporaneous Team 10. However, it filtered-out those ideas promoted by the Team 10 which celebrated the vernacular, registered positive aspects in slum life, or granted agency to grassroots groups; as well as the Inter-American recommendations to support self-construction. Thus, despite contemporaneous discussions which could have led to an engagement with bottom-up participation, the PAB ultimately proposed the eradication of

the shantytowns and the forceful displacement of their inhabitants. The PAB was a long term project carried out during two elected governments and a dictatorship, and within the international context of the Cold War. Of the various design approaches mentioned, this article will focus on the PAB's engagement with high-modernist CIAM and Team 10 conceptions. [1]

This article contributes to current discussions in design history by incorporating a case study located in the Global South, normally excluded from mainstream narratives, especially in English language, into them; by presenting a non-canonical example of architectural and urban design contextualised in its political and social dimensions; and by analysing a modern case study of anonymous authorship designed by the technical team of a local government institution (the architects' names were never publicly revealed). The term 'anonymous' in this context does not mean that there was no agency accountable for the project's design, but rather that the lack of information about the designers' biographies interestingly leads to a detachment from more traditional, Pevsnerian, approaches focused on individual architects' trajectories. [2] In this way, the article helps to both expand and redefine the boundaries of design studies, these conceptualised as the study of 'the conception and planning of the artificial', [3] supporting Jilly Traganou's argument for their engagement with architectural studies; [4] and to contribute to an emerging 'genuinely global' [5] line of design history inquiry in Sarah Lichtman's words.

The PAB has received extremely scarce, if any, scholarly attention. This research gap is surprising in a context where the South West of Buenos Aires has recently moved to the forefront of the urban discussion. The main studies to partially address the PAB are Andrea Catenazzi and Teresa Boselli's 'Los arquitectos proyectistas y las políticas oficiales de vivienda' and Leandro Benmergui's 'The Alliance for Progress and Housing Policy in Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires in the 1960s', both focused on housing. [6] While Catenazzi and Boselli analyse the role of architects as housing designers within public offices, in contrast to private practice, Benmergui highlights the transnational dimension of the PAB within the Cold War context. Regarding the appropriation and use of modern architecture ideas in

Latin America, in contrast, there is a wider spectrum of works, including Jorge Francisco Liernur and Pablo Pschepiurca's *La red austral* and Valerie Fraser's *Building the New World*.[7] This article contributes to such expanding field by offering a critical analysis of the way in which foreign ideas of modern design were creatively, and also politically, appropriated in the design of a case which is yet to receive thorough scholarly consideration.

Parque Almirante Brown

Parque Almirante Brown was a programme of sanitisation of the marshland areas located in the South-West of Buenos Aires carried out by the Municipality between 1961 and the mid-1970s. The South of the city had traditionally been the site for the industry and the working classes, as it consisted of lower land exposed to regular floods. The South-West, in particular, was an area of marshlands, which due to this quality had been left undeveloped until late in the twentieth century. In addition, from the 1920s the grounds became an open-air garbage dump. When, by the mid-twentieth century, increasing migration to the city concided with a saturated housing market, the vacant grounds of the South West became a key location for the lowest-income migrants to settle, creating or expanding shantytowns. The PAB programme covered a wide area of the South-West, limited to the administrative borders of the Capital City, roughly equivalent to the current Comuna 8 (Fig. 1). It is worth noting that the PAB was the term used to refer both to an urban programme and the area it comprised, but not literally to a park as its Spanish name could seem to indicate.

The PAB proposed to drain the South West marshlands by creating two regulating lakes (transporting soil from its lowest to its highest grounds) and by completing the channelling underground of a brook that crossed the floodplains (Fig. 2). Following these interventions, the grounds were zoned to include leisure facilities (sports areas, a zoo, a theatre, an open-air exhibitions site, commercial and gastronomic areas); educational premises (primary and secondary schools, plus a university); buildings for public uses such as a hospital, a police station, and a fire station; and, importantly, housing (Fig. 3).[8] Regarding shantytowns, the PAB design proposed their full demolition and the relocation of
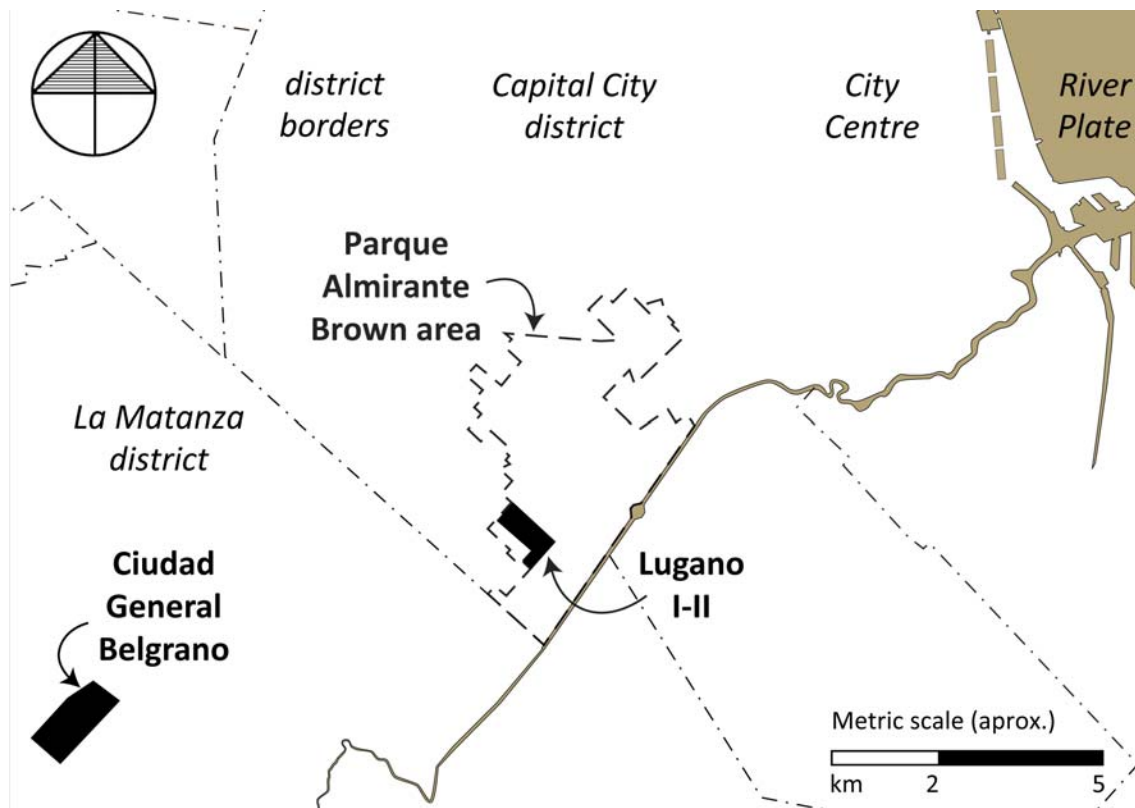
Fig. 1. Location of Parque Almirante Brown area, Lugano I-II and Ciudad General Belgrano within Buenos Aires. Source: author's drawing.

their residents. The PAB was designed and implemented by the Municipality's housing department, the Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda (CMV; Municipal Housing Commission). In addition, it received partial funding from the Inter-American Development Bank in 1965.

The PAB can be read as the culmination of a series of debates and initiatives for the South West of Buenos Aires. Draining and urbanising the South West marshlands had been an aspiration of the national state and the Municipality of Buenos Aires since early in the twentieth century, with some proposals designing the area as a set of fringe parks to serve the whole city (such as Jean-Claude Nicolas Forestier's Plan Orgánico para la Urbanización del Municipio, 1925; and Manuel González Maseda's in 1935) and with others regarding it as an extension of the urban fabric of its surroundings.[9] It was the former perspective that prevailed in the long run. Amongst these plans, a sequence of CIAM-inspired designs started gaining increasing importance. The first of them was the 'Plan Director para Buenos Aires',

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Fig. 2. Soil removal as part of the Parque Almirante Brown. Source: Archivo Fotográfico de la Subsecretaría de Planeamiento "Alberto Aquilino López", Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires.

elaborated by Juan Kurchan and Jorge Ferrari Hardoy in collaboration with Le Corbusier between 1937 and 1940.[10]It proposed the densification of the urban fabric towards the city centre and the riverbank. Regarding the South-West, it envisaged a large park, the Parque del Sur, echoing Forestier's and Maseda's ideas. The Plan Director followed the ideas promoted in the Athens Charter through its emphasis on the need for sunlight and ventilation in all inhabited spaces; its recognition of the need for urban growth; a preference for high population densities materialised in high-rise blocks with generous space between them; and the use of zoning.[11]The Plan Director was incorporated into the state sphere in 1947 through the creation of a municipal department in charge of developing it further for implementation, the 'Estudio del Plan de Buenos Aires' (EPBA; Plan for Buenos Aires Office).[12] The activities of the EPBA only lasted until 1949, and the plan that it produced was

Fig. 3. Parque Almirante Brown land uses. Source: Centro Urbano Integrado Parque Almirante Brown: Solicitud de préstamo al Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, Buenos Aires: Municipalidad de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 19

never realised. Its work was, however, vital for the advancement of debates about urban planning and design in Buenos Aires, including the conception of the PAB.

In the context of these initiatives, a particularly important design for the South West was the scheme produced by architects Ítala Fulvia Villa and Horacio Nazar in 1945, which studied the area in depth and provided a detailed proposal combining green areas, public utilities and housing.[13] Villa and Nazar's design was not only one of the first modern urban designs for Buenos Aires, but also the first one specifically focused on the floodplains. It followed a CIAM approach in its use of zoning and housing design, simultaneously echoing

earlier conceptions of the South West as an expanse of green space on the city's margins. Villa and Nazar's plan was a well-informed sanitation and urbanisation design for the area rooted in a particularly comprehensive understanding of the South West. Thus it contrasted with previous and contemporaneous initiatives which referred to and represented the South West in extremely vague terms.

The ideas, aspirations and concerns about the South West narrated thus far would only be materialised in the 1960s with the implementation of the PAB programme. Indeed, the PAB was itself a localised programme under a modern master plan for Greater Buenos Aires, the 'Plan Regulador de Buenos Aires' (PRBA; Regulatory Plan of Buenos Aires). The office developing the PRBA had been created by the city mayor in 1958,[14] and included key members of the previously dismantled EPBA, whose work it took as a point of departure. However, the PRBA went beyond what the EPBA had proposed in the 1940s: while the EPBA had sought to concentrate the city in the coast through high-rise blocks, the PRBA proposed decentralisation into local centres; it studied issues such as transport in much greater detail; and it prescribed localised proposals for areas such as the South-West. In fact, as has been argued by Liernur and Pschepiurca, the proposal previously advanced by the EPBA had not been an urban plan as such, in its modern conception, but rather an architectural design of metropolitan scale.[15] In this sense, the PRBA can be read as the first masterplan for Buenos Aires. The office in charge of the PRBA was dismantled in 1966, before the completion of the plan. The PAB programme, however, continued to be developed since it was implemented by another department, the CMV.

The creation of the PAB followed indications given by the PRBA as early as 1961.[16] Amongst other things, the PRBA prescribed the 'saneamiento' of the South West marshlands: a term whose scope was never clearly traced, but which implied, in practical terms, the draining of the grounds and their management through the assignment of land uses. Thus, the PAB design reflected the high modernist imaginary of the city in a series of aspects. First, the PAB was based on a concern about the city's lack of green spaces (and corresponding lack

of sunlight and ventilation), and it presented itself as a solution. Second, in order to provide more green space, the PAB proceeded to zoning, i.e., assigning specific functions such as lodging, working, leisure and circulation to urban land, as promoted by the CIAM Athens Charter. Third, for the function of housing, the design advanced by the PAB took the form of high-rise pavilions floating over green areas. Finally, in its broader assumptions and gestures, the PAB shared the CIAM design approach of completely sweeping away existing features to make room for a new environment considered better suited to modern times. The idea of rupture with the past was, in fact, crucial for the Modern Movement – as it was for the artistic avant-gardes closely related to it – both regarding past architectural styles as well as spaces which were considered inefficient or unhealthy.[17]

Unsurprisingly, and in line with the early-CIAM approach towards *îlots insalubres*, the PAB aimed at the complete removal of shantytowns and their replacement with green areas and modern housing. However, this housing was offered to families with higher budgets than those inhabiting shantytowns, who were thus very likely to be displaced. In fact, the alternative accommodation offered to evicted residents was based on their income. It must be remembered that, regarding *îlots insalubres* or slums, the Athens Charter specifically stated that these should be 'demolished and replaced by green surfaces: adjacent neighbourhoods will become sanitised'.[18] No consideration was given, however, to the future of their inhabitants.

The forced eviction and re-accommodation of shantytown residents was not new in Buenos Aires. Already in 1956 the first state plan to address shantytowns, the Plan de Emergencia (PE; Emergency Plan), had prescribed their removal and the relocation of their residents into purpose-built social housing.[19] This plan regarded residents as indolent and uneducated, and therefore responsible for their own living condition. In accordance with these views, the housing units designed by the PE were conceived of as 'adaptation dwellings', as it was argued that residents needed to undergo a process of re-education. This idea of shantytown eradication, framed by a view of shantytown residents as undeserving poor, was echoed in later pieces of local legislation during the period 1958-1962 and in a 1962

Fig. 4. Lugano I-II housing complex. Architectural perspective by CMV technical department. Source: Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, *Centro Urbano Integrado Parque Almirante Brown: Solicitud de préstamo al Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo*, Buenos Aires: Municipalidad de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 1965, II.

unrealised municipal eviction proposal.[20] From the same basic premises (although phrased in gentler language) the PAB judged that shantytown residents possessed different 'psychological, cultural or moral characteristics'[21] than those living elsewhere in the city, and that they would benefit from being forcefully mixed with other low-income families such as those relocated from tenements.

The housing offered by the PAB was structured according to two main schemes. One of these was the complex Lugano I-II, designed as high-density pavilions set within large green areas (Fig. 4).[22] Lugano I-II was presented as the housing 'of the year 2000', with a discourse which emphasised modernity and comfort.[23] Second, the CMV had purchased land in a surrounding district, La Matanza, to construct a neighbourhood for evicted shantytown residents: Ciudad General Belgrano (CGB; General Belgrano City).[24] Both complexes were
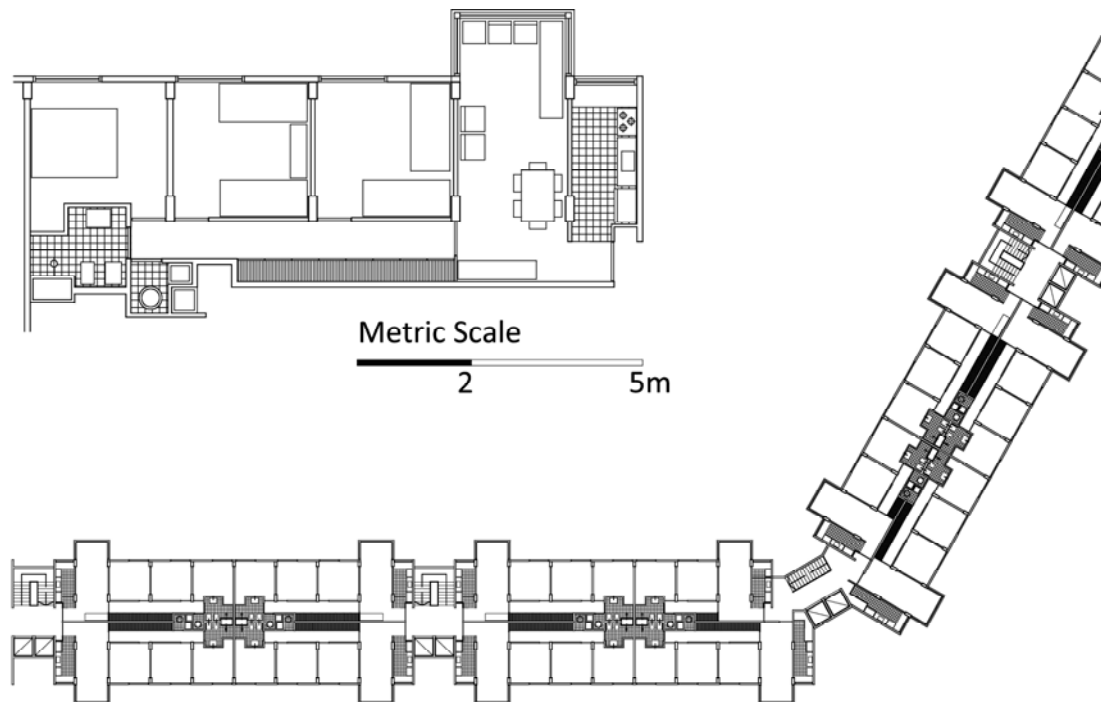
Fig. 5. Lugano I-II housing units. Source: author's drawing.

composed of a repetition of minimum dwelling units designed for optimum ventilation and sunlight, with separate bedrooms for different family members aside from modern (though tight) living rooms, kitchens and bathrooms (Fig. 5). They included common facilities such as shops, sports centres or clubs.

To stay in the PAB area families needed to earn enough to afford the instalments for purchasing units in Lugano I-II. These were subsidised, but still largely unaffordable for the vast majority of the shantytown population. The alternative option was to buy a unit further away in CGB at a lower price. We learn from later documents, however, that while 20% of the population of shantytowns were eventually able to afford the Lugano I-II units, only 30% bought those in CGB.[25] The situation of those unable to afford any of the aforementioned options was not specifically addressed by the PAB: in 1965 the CMV stated that '[t]hose who for some reason did not have enough income to purchase units in Ciudad General Belgrano will be notified and *orientated towards other particular solutions*'.[26] The ambiguity implied

in this phrase is not clarified at any point in the document, as it is the only mention of families in this situation. This meant, in practice, that after 1968 they were sent to small and extremely precarious units located in the city's margins, which in turn developed into new shantytowns.[27]

CIAM ideas in Argentina: Team 10 in the South-West?

It has been argued that the housing produced in the PAB followed the architectural premises of Team 10 (a group of young modernist architects who reacted against the mainstream tenets of the Modern Movement in the late 1950s) through its design for Lugano I-II.[28] There are design elements in Lugano which can certainly be understood to have been inspired by Team 10, such as the inter-connection of otherwise isolated pavilions via the use of internal and elevated streets; the separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic; or the attempt to create a new urban landscape.[29] Furthermore, incorporating the considerations of a contemporaneous approach to modern architecture into the PAB design may have been a natural step. However, it is equally possible to argue that there is a fundamental gap between the Team 10 approach and that of the PAB which does not reside in their design outputs, or in the architectural components used, but in their very conceptual premises. In fact, the Team 10 had developed and sustained a rich celebration of vernacular traditions, the role of the user, and the liveliness of slums, together with a re-conceptualization of urban design that prioritised human experience over strict functional zoning, which was entirely absent from the PAB.[30]

Starting in 1953, and gaining further momentum throughout the 1960s, young architects affiliated to the CIAM such as Aldo Van Eyck, Georges Candilis and Shadrach Woods, as well as Alison and Peter Smithson, started to heavily question the modern architectural principles sustained by the Athens Charter, which they considered overly dehumanising and too orthodox in their approach to functionalism. Gathering together in 1953 in the 9th CIAM Congress, held at Aix-en Provence, France, the group set out to

organise the 10th CIAM conference, which led to its name as Team 10. The group was heterogeneous, but held together by its members' shared understanding of urban space, their approach towards urban design, and their criticism of the earlier CIAM perspective.

Team 10 understood space as the expression of human behaviour. This led to a radical shift in the CIAM consideration of nineteenth-century slums (in this case, in reference to overcrowding in central areas) and vernacular architecture. Instead of conceiving of them as the epitome of unhygienic living conditions, disorder and lack of efficiency, for example, Van Eyck described slums as 'the first manifestation of a population which escaped anonymity and [...] intended to make recognised its own right to define itself in relation to total space',[31] contrasting them with the sterile modern designs that were the normal outcome of programmes of slum clearance. Likewise, vernacular or spontaneous architecture was read as a community's spatial expression. In fact, in the context of a wave of independence movements across emerging African nations, a number of architects had developed an interest in vernacular architecture. This can be seen in van Eyck's visits to Africa (1947-52 and 1960) and his writings on Dogon and Pueblo architecture;[32] in the work undertaken by Candilis, Woods, Michel Écochard and others in Morocco;[33] or, later (beyond the Team 10), in the success of Bernard Rudofsky's Museum of Modern Art exhibition *Architecture without Architects*.[34]

Écochard, Candilis and Woods's work in Morocco was additionally concerned with the challenge of housing large numbers of people, in response to accommodation needs, through non-alienating ways of modern design: 'l'habitat pour le plus grand nombre' (housing for the greatest number).[35] The main preoccupation here concerned how to provide a solution which reflected the scale of the problem while at the same time leading to humanised environments. Candilis and Woods focused on architecture which could provide 'a framework in which man can be again master of his home'.[36] Van Eyck opened up a similar debate regarding the 'aesthetics of number', focused on understanding the individual as a means of understanding the large number: 'Quantity cannot be humanized [...] as long as we don't know what a large number of people really is, or for that matter, what a single person

really is'. [37] Finally, it is possible to argue that Team 10's enthusiastic attention to architectural practices outside the West, such as African vernacular or squatter settlements, implied a turning-point regarding the values pursued by architects. Indeed, although some of these conceptions may appear as romanticised today, they were ground breaking in their context, and they implicitly questioned the very place of the West in the hierarchy of production of architectural meaning.

In addition to re-casting conceptions of slums, vernacular architecture, and mass-scale housing, Team 10 challenged early CIAM ideas about the guiding principles of urban functioning. Cities were not structured, for Team 10, according to four abstract functions, but articulated instead on the basis of increasing scales of human association as perceived by the individual: family, street, district and city.[38] Slightly later, in the late 1960s, a concern for user participation started gaining momentum, as can be seen in the work of Team 10 members such as Ralph Erskine or Giancarlo di Carlo, or architects like Lucien Kroll.[39]

It is difficult to read any of these perspectives in the design, the text or the approach of the PAB. In fact, ideas such as the scales of association, the aesthetics of number or the interest in the vernacular do not seem to feature in a design such as Lugano I-II, and are also notably absent from the official discourse about the project which emphasises efficiency and modern infrastructure. Even more strikingly, the Team 10's celebration of slums and its interest in spontaneous architecture sit completely at odds with the PAB's contempt for shantytown residents and its eradication perspective. More broadly, Team 10's careful approach to the user; the conception of users' identities as reflected in, while continuously constructed by, their built environments; or the celebration of users' appropriation and spatial practices are difficult to read not only in the concepts underpinning Lugano I-II but also in its centralised process of design and construction. Beyond housing, Team 10's questioning of the early-CIAM ideas concerning the guiding principles of urban functioning remained absent from the PAB, which instead used zoning.

The relative absence of Team 10 concepts within 1960s Buenos Aires state urban and housing design may at first sight seem surprising. After a few decades of debate and its

incorporation into social housing design during 1945-1955, modern design had secured a fairly comfortable place as the architecture of the state.[40] However, as we have seen, state programmes such as those implemented in the South-West tended to work on the basis of a high modernist approach rather than a revised, contemporaneous version of the modern city as advanced by the Team 10. In this regard, the PAB can be considered anachronistic to the discussions of its era. This preference and selection responded, however, to the functionality of the early CIAM for state agendas. For example, had it suited the state perspective, the Team 10s' celebration of architecture materialised by its own users, read as a reflection of human culture, could have been relevant for articulating an urban intervention for the South-West. Although the South West shantytowns do not correspond exactly to the vernacular architecture that Team 10 members had observed in rural native towns, and they likewise differed from European slums, their qualities of self-construction and the contrast of their spatialities with repetitive housing could have been used in the PAB to incorporating a wider range of responses to local conditions than large-scale top-down housing. Engaging the user and opening further housing options could have also ensured that shantytown residents were well served by the programme, which was ultimately not the case.

Another Team 10 notion that may have enriched interventions in the South-West was that of the scales of association and number. In fact, in a context where vast solutions were necessary but where it was vital to take into account social networks and to avoid alienated environments, the intellectual questioning of the mass scale undertaken by Team 10 was particularly relevant. Finally, the Team 10 position entailing the revision of the cultural prerogatives of the West could have been productive in an Argentine context to de-link from pre-established planning assumptions and observe local issues anew. Nevertheless, considerations such as these were not incorporated nor mentioned. The Argentine state and the Buenos Aires municipality, in fact, were mainly concerned about the control of non-compliant populations, and aimed at linking themselves to the imaginary of a functionalist, efficient environment. By taking into consideration the governments' anxieties and agendas, therefore, it can be argued that it was precisely *because* of their questioning of hierarchies,

customary practice and excessive simplification, that Team 10 approaches were ignored by the PAB, which preferred to stick to an early CIAM vision.

The selections and decisions made are thus not surprising given the political context of the implementation of the PAB, which was structured around the proscription of the majority party, Peronism, which in itself represented the repression of working class' agency and voice. The political situation in Argentina between 1955 and 1983 was extremely unstable, with predominance of military governments, or governments placed under tight military control.

In sync with the rest of Latin America, Argentina had thrived economically since the development of its export economy in the 1870s. The export of agricultural and livestock products funded the import of manufactured goods. At the same time the country received large waves of international immigration from Europe and East Asia. The model, however, proved unsustainable in the face of the 1929 international crisis, which led to the gradual re-structuring of the national economy toward a model of import substitutions. This led to the expansion of the light industry and to further urban growth, although this time largely facilitated through internal migrations from rural areas to larger cities. The government of Juan Domingo Perón (1945-1955) tried to continue the process of industrialisation and sought to implement the redistribution of benefits. However, the opposition brought him down in 1955 when a *coup d'état* and replaced Perón's government with a heterogeneous coalition, sending Perón personally into exile and proscribing his party and its symbols.[41]

It was against this background that the PAB programme was conceived of and implemented. Three pretty different governments ruled Argentina between 1961 and 1973, with the commonality however of the prescription of Peronism, and with it an explicit policy of silencing of the working classes. Elections were called in 1958 and won by Arturo Frondizi (1958-1962), who could only secure his victory by building a secret alliance with the proscribed and exiled former president Perón. Perón's administration had left a lasting memory in the working classes, who remained Peronist throughout the decades that

followed, and the governments elected during the proscription of Peronism enjoyed limited legitimacy as they were not the real choice of the electorate. It was under Frondizi's government that the programme PAB was originally conceived of, since it was outlined by the PRBA in 1961. Frondizi aimed at expanding industrialisation, so far concentrated in light industry, to heavy industry, also aiming at making use of national oil, for which he opened the country to foreign investment. This model, termed developmentalism, was maintained (albeit with alterations) until 1976. However, lacking popular support and distrusted by the military, Frondizi was overthrown by a coup d'état in 1962.

José María Guido, head of the Senate, completed Frondizi's term in office, in an attempt by the military to appear faithful to constitutional rule. Arturo Illia (1963-1966) won the following elections. With Peronism prohibited, however, the legitimacy of his government was extremely weak. Illia implemented policies of nationalisation and social redistribution in an attempt to win the support of the working classes. During Illia's government the PAB started proper, first with municipal funds and after 1965 with an Inter-American Development Bank loan. However, he was not able to build lasting alliances to back up his position. Criticised by both Peronists and anti-Peronists, he was overthrown in 1966 by the fourth coup d'état of the century.

The dictator that followed, Juan Carlos Onganía, took power with ambitious rhetoric not supported by any clear government plan. Real wages declined with protests initially suffocated by political repression. By 1969, however, popular discontent with the government had grown enough to lead to a massive uprising in the city of Córdoba which became known as the Cordobazo. What ensued was a rapidly growing spiral of popular mobilisation. In June 1970 Onganía had toto hand power to other members of the militaryand in 1971, in an attempt to achieve social calm, the government lifted the ban on Peronism. In March 1973 Perón's candidate, Héctor Cámpora, won a national election, and in October of the same year he was replaced by Perón.

Given this political context, it is possible to argue that the state had specific reasons to prefer an early CIAM approach. Whether under tutelary democracies or under

dictatorships, the state departments implementing plans during the 1960s were working in a context where the population's choices and political participation were not valued as a priority. This translated into the planning field: why would a political power that aimed at subduing the working classes value, or even incorporate, grassroots, non-compliant architecture? Even more natural is the persistence of epistemological hierarchies regarding Western thought: indeed a government devoted to the advancement of Western values (as the dictatorships explicitly were, and also implicitly the elected governments) held no interest in engaging with a design approach that may challenge their universality. Regarding economies of scale, during the implementation of the PAB, the Municipality presented its work in terms of efficiency: grasping the complexity of the urban situation and the subtleties of different associations of scale did not rank high in its priorities. Regarding mass housing, it is worth bearing in mind that large construction companies devoted resources to lobby governments during this period, influencing state decisions that economically benefited them such as the production of large numbers of repeated units.[42] Finally, it must be taken into account that, following the series of plans developed since the Plan Director, early-CIAM urban design was by the 1960s fully consolidated as an architectural and technical option. The governments which ruled Argentina were anxious to justify their positions in power. Thus, returning to well-established intellectual tools rather than experimenting with newer ones responded better to their attempt to portray themselves as the epitome of modernity, effectiveness and order.

Influence/Selection/Transformation

Jorge Francisco Liernur has discussed the concepts of 'selection' and 'transformation' in opposition to that of 'influence' when analysing the ways in which North-Atlantic conceptualisations were (re-)articulated in Argentina. According to Liernur's argument, the incorporation of foreign ideas and practices within a local peripheral canon does not entail a passive process of reception, or 'influence', but rather the careful selection of only some of the conceptual features produced elsewhere. [43] Liernur underlines the autonomy and

creativity embodied in this practice. Thus, he questions traditional approaches to Argentine architectural history which read the local production as mere imperfect copying – a conceptual scheme that he calls 'headquarter offices/branch'.[44] From Liernur's perspective, therefore, the incorporation of modern conceptions into Argentine architecture did not consist of the mechanical transcription of foreign constructs but of a creative action through which a new type of construct was produced: the transformation of 'a cultural partiality of external origin into internal common sense'.[45] As part of a broader discussion of Argentine culture, Beatriz Sarlo has developed a similar argument in relation to the works of writer Jorge Luis Borges. Sarlo observes that Borges plays with different types of foreign influence, free from the constraints that history and cultural tradition place on authors in their original contexts. In doing so, Borges re-articulates the Argentine literary tradition: '...the re-arrangement of national [Argentine] cultural traditions allows him to trim, choose and go over the foreign literatures without prejudices'.[46] Thus, the case of Borges exemplifies the ways in which, according to Sarlo, artists at the (so-called) peripheries enjoy the freedom to choose and experiment with external influences in a playful and creative fashion.

In *La Red Austral* Liernur and Pschepiurca go one step further by comparing the incorporation of an external element – in this case an artist/architect, Le Corbusier – into a local milieu with a chemical transformation, where a reagent is introduced into a given substance, thus leading to the synthesis of a new product.[47] With this analogy Liernur and Pschepiurca are stressing the fact that both elements are active in the process, and both emerge from it transformed. Thus, in their analysis of Le Corbusier's 1929 visit to Argentina, these authors are just as interested in its repercussions in the local architectural milieu as they are in the effect it had on Le Corbusier's thinking and production. Along the same lines, in other writings, Liernur analyses how post-war British architects incorporated elements of Brazilian architecture, such as the brise-soleil, into their designs;[48] or the influence of North African architectural styles for the embracement of the use of the flat roof in Western Modern Architecture.[49]

Liernur's approach is particularly useful for understanding the process of incorporation of CIAM ideas into the PAB, as it highlights the fact that concepts which originated in other contexts are incorporated selectively into new designs, and transformed through the same process of incorporation. However, it is worth noting that Liernur's approach leaves the hierarchies between periphery and centre, as well as the political implications of the practices analysed, insufficiently questioned. Indeed, the political, social and economic contexts in which the cited selections and transformations took place were those of an imbalance of power, both internationally and within nations. Across the Americas, the adoption of cultural practices originating in Europe was not accidental but was, instead, the result of a long-term active process of military, political and economic colonisation. Hispanic America, in particular, witnessed not only the imposition of religious, cultural and social practices by those holding military supremacy but also the systematic destruction of indigenous practices. The appropriation and adaptation of cultural constructs, therefore, did not represent a process equally shared by the various intervening parts but rather one closely linked to the exercise of power. Furthermore, in demographic terms, the Spanish conquest left a legacy in which those in power were culturally – and often ethnically – identified with the European.[50] Following the independence of what today are Latin American nations, the role of local élites became central to the articulation of national cultural milieus. Thus, when seeking to develop, transform or enrich national cultures, those same élites returned to the European tradition because it held for them a position of prestige and because it represented an effective tool with which to reinforce their own symbolic power within the local context. In the case of Argentina, in particular, following independence the Spanish cultural legacy was rejected by the local élite, and it was therefore a French cultural model that was adopted, later joined by the Anglo-Saxon.[51] Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, alarmed by the affluence of masses of South European immigrants whom they regarded as uncultivated, those same local élites partially reclaimed the colonial cultural heritage in an attempt at differentiating the national from those recently arrived, as can be seen through the emergence of Neocolonial architecture,

amongst other manifestations.[52] These tensions were reflected in the spatial structuring of Latin American cities and the distribution of population within them not only during the Colonial era but also after independence.[53]

It is thus possible to see that the discussions, appropriations, transformations and selections related to the modern city in Argentina took place in a context crossed by tensions of political and cultural power. On the one hand, we note a material imbalance: that of the larger economic and military power of North-Atlantic countries in contrast to Latin American ones, pre-dated in former centuries by the open colonisation by Portugal and Spain. On the other hand, although related to the former point, a symbolic imbalance was in place: ideas and works produced in the North carried, for the actors who made decisions, a greater or more relevant semantic power than those produced in the South. In relation to this, it is worth noting that the internal debates and contradictions within North-Atlantic narratives (such as, for example, within modern architecture, the debate between high modernism and the Team 10) are often ignored when incorporated in the South. This simplification follows social or political reasons relevant to each case.[54] However, it simultaneously deprives the narratives of their complexity, and the appropriation process of its potential transformative power. In other words, while the internal tensions of modern architecture (the ambiguity of colonial discourse, in postcolonial terms) could have produced new conceptions and new agencies when interrogated from and used by Buenos Aires practice, the process of selection undertaken by the PAB instead perpetuated existing power structures.[55]

Conclusion

By the time shantytowns were expanding in Buenos Aires to accommodate the increasing migration to the city, modern urban planning was gaining momentum throughout the Americas and worldwide. Mid-twentieth century Argentine planning synthesised an existing tradition of CIAM-inspired urban design for Buenos Aires with local concerns (such as the sanitisation of the South West) and the state position held towards shantytowns. In other

words, it incorporated ideas originally produced in other geographical and socio-economic contexts and applied them to the local territory – a process which was not free of tensions.

Through its study and contextualisation of historical evidence this article has shown that the incorporation into the PAB of ideas promoted by the CIAM was part of a longer genealogy of plans for South West Buenos Aires, and that it filtered out some relevant concepts which were discussed internationally while adopting others. These decisions were driven by the broader state (both national and municipal) agenda. More specifically, from those debates held by the modern architectural movement, the PAB programme recovered ideas such as slum clearance, the densification of target locations, urban structuring and land use following the Athens Charter, and modes of housing design attentive to light and sun in the form of high-rise pavilions. It ignored, however, crucial aspects of contemporary modern architecture debates, such as the celebration of the role of users and the value attributed to architectural vernaculars, which had been developed by some authors as an antidote to the potentially dehumanising aspects of modernism. None of these discussions were used to reconceptualise the role of shantytowns in the city. Shantytowns were, instead, considered a target for eradication as they did not comply with the idea of modernity.

The selective use, appropriation and recasting of international discussions by governments anxious to control the population and to portray themselves as promoters of economic and industrial progress can be read through the ideas of selection and transformation advanced by Liernur and Pschepiurca. However, any design exchange occurs within a specific political context. In the case of the PAB, the proscription of the majority party and the Western bias of the successive governments reflected a deeply entrenched disregard for people's agency and spontaneous housing construction. The creative process of selectively incorporating conceptual elements produced for other urban contexts, and transforming them and the intervening parties in the process thus became, in the PAB, a background-looking practice that filtered out crucial elements which could have entailed innovation. In addition, and with particular reference to shantytowns, both the modern urban planning tradition in Buenos Aires, and the series of state initiatives towards

shantytowns discussed, pointed strongly to a perspective focused on shantytown eradication. In other words, in its creative process of adaptation of modern design constructs, the PAB neglected a possible re-conceptualisation of the shantytowns and embarked instead on an initiative that would displace and disadvantage their residents.

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[1] Discussion of the PAB's engagement with the inter-American debates on urban planning falls beyond the scope of the present article. However, it is useful to highlight that, even though the PAB benefitted from an Inter-American Development Bank loan in the context of the Alliance for Progress, it did filter those concepts related to self help that the Alliance, together with inter-American agencies, would have otherwise promoted.

[2] Andrea Catenazzi and Teresa Boselli, 'Los arquitectos proyectistas y las políticas oficiales de vivienda – Área Metropolitana de Buenos Aires 1963-1973. Casos: oficina estatal de proyecto y sistema de concurso', *Area*, 5 (1997), 35–53.

[3] Victor Margolin, 'Design History or Design Studies: Subject Matter and Methods', *Design Studies* 13. no. 2 (1992): 104–116, 114, itself quoted from Richard Buchanan and Victor Margolin, programme statement for the conference 'Discovering design,' held at the University of Illinois, Chicago, 5-6 November 1990.

[4] Jilly Traganou, 'Architectural and Spatial Design Studies: Inscribing Architecture in Design Studies', *Design History* 22, no. 2 (2009): 173-181.

[5] Sarah A. Lichtman, 'Reconsidering the History of Design Survey', *Design History* 22, no. 4 (2009): 341-350, 347.

[6] Catenazzi and Boselli, op. cit.; Leandro Benmergui, 'The Alliance for Progress and Housing Policy in Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires in the 1960s', *Urban History* 36, special issue no. 2 (2009): 303–26.

[7] Jorge Francisco Liernur and Pablo Pschepiurca, *La red austral: Obras y proyectos de Le Corbusier y sus discípulos en la Argentina (1924-1965)*, Bernal: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes/Prometeo, 2008; Valerie Fraser, *Building the New World: Studies in the Modern Architecture of Latin America 1930-1960*, London Verso, 2000.

[8] Organización del Plan Regulador, *Saneamiento, urbanización y desarrollo del Parque Almirante Brown y su zona de influencia - Bañado de Flores - Memoria Técnica*, Buenos Aires: Municipalidad de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 1961; Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, *Centro Urbano Integrado Parque Almirante Brown: Solicitud de préstamo al Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo*, Buenos Aires: Municipalidad de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 1965; Organización del Plan Regulador, *Descripción Sintética del Plan Regulador* (Buenos Aires: Municipalidad de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 1968), II: 57–58.

[9] Alicia Novick, 'La ciudad y los grandes proyectos', in *Debates sobre ciudad y territorio: los aportes del CIHaM, Centro de Investigación Hábitat y Municipios*, ed. David Kullock and Alicia Novick (Buenos Aires: Nobuko, 2010), 41-68.

[10] Liernur and Pschepiurca, op. cit., 177-218.

[11] *La Charte d'Athènes*, Paris: Plon, 1943, 1979 Kraus reprint. For a discussion of CIAM urbanism see Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960*, London: MIT Press, 2000.

[12] Anahi Ballent, *Las huellas de la política: vivienda, ciudad, peronismo en Buenos Aires, 1943-1955*, Bernal, Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes/Prometeo, 2005; Ramón Gutiérrez, 'Los inicios del urbanismo en la Argentina. Parte 1 – El aporte francés', *Arquitexts* 87, no. 01 (2007), available at http://www.vitruvius.com.br/revistas/read/arquitextos/08.087/216/es [accessed 7 April 2017]; Liernur and Pschepiurca, op. cit., 75–236.

[13] Ítala Fulvia Villa and Horacio Nazar, 'Urbanización del Bajo de Flores', *Revista de Información Municipal*, Memoria Sintética 1943-44-45 (1945): 637–673; Ballent, op. cit., 221–23.

[14] Ordenanza Municipal 14.627/1958, *Boletín Municipal de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires* 10,959, Buenos Aires: Municipalidad de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (1958).

[15] Liernur and Pschepiurca, op. cit., 235.

[16] Organización del Plan Regulador, *Saneamiento, urbanización y desarrollo del Parque Almirante Brown y su zona de influencia*.

[17] Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning* (New York: Dover, 1987), 5–12; Manfredo Tafuri, 'Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology', in *Architecture Theory Since 1968*, ed. Michael Hays (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1998).

[18] *La Charte d'Athènes*, 141–142, my translation.

[19] Comisión Nacional de la Vivienda, *Plan de Emergencia: Informe elevado al Poder Ejecutivo Nacional* (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión, 1956).

[20] Resolución Municipal 14.449/1958, *Boletín Municipal de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires* 10,916 (1958); Resolución Municipal 15.694/1959, *H. Concejo Deliberante*, Buenos Aires: Municipalidad de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (1959); Decreto Municipal 15.759/1962, *Boletín Municipal de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires* 11,940 (1962); 'Declaran la guerra a las villas', *Nuestra Palabra*, 11 June 1963.

[21] Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, *Centro Urbano Integrado*, Chapter VII.5, my translation.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, *Parque Almirante Brown, Conjunto Urbano Lugano I-II* (Buenos Aires, 1973), 7.

[24] Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, *Centro Urbano Integrado*, Chapter IV.1.

[25] Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, 'Acta nº 111/70' (Buenos Aires: 1970), appendix I, p. 1; Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, 'C.M.V. _ Villas de Emergencia', Buenos Aires: 1970.

[26] Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, *Centro Urbano Integrado*, Chapter VII.5, par.2, my translation and my emphasis.

[27] Oscar Yujnovsky, *Claves políticas del problema habitacional argentino (1955-1981)*, (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Latinoamericano, 1984), 163–169; Alicia Ziccardi, 'Políticas de vivienda y movimientos urbanos: El caso de Buenos Aires (1963-1973)', unpublished dissertation (Buenos Aires:

Centro de Estudios Urbanos y Regionales, 1977), 113–125; Eduardo Blaustein, *Prohibido vivir aquí: una historia de los planes de erradicación de villas de la última dictadura* (Buenos Aires: Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, 2001), 131–137.

[28] Anahi Ballent, 'Vivienda de interés social', in *Diccionario de Arquitectura en la Argentina*, ed. Jorge Francisco Liernur and Fernando Aliata (Buenos Aires: Clarín, 2004),VI: 176-187; Benmergui, op. cit., 319–320.

[29] Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, *Centro Urbano Integrado*; 'Lugano I-II, Parque Almirante Brown, Buenos Aires, 1967/68', *Summa* 18 (1969): 53–62; 'Barrio Lugano I y II', *Nuestra Arquitectura* 464 (1970): 42–46; 'Conjunto Lugano I y II', *Construcciones* 227 (1971): 360–66.

[30] *Team 10 Primer*, ed. Alison Smithson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968); Mumford, op. cit.; Tom Avermaete, *Another Modern: The Post-War Architecture and Urbanism of Candilis-Josic-Woods*, Rotterdam: NAi, 2005.

[31] Aldo van Eyck, 'The Role of the Architect', in *Team 10 Primer*, 24–28.

[32] Aldo van Eyck, 'Architecture of Dogon', *Architectural Forum* (September 1961): 116–21; Aldo van Eyck, 'Straling van Het Configuratieve', *Forum* 3 (1962): 81–94; Aldo van Eyck, 'Dogon: Mand-Huis-Dorp-Wereld', *Forum* (July 1967): 30–50; Francis Strauven, *Aldo van Eyck – The Shape of Relativity* (Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura, 1998), 143–49.

[33]Mumford, op. cit., 209–11 and 227–33.

[34] Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture without Architects: A Short Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1964).

[35] Smithson, op. cit., 74 and 76; Mark Swenarton, Tom Avermaete, and Dirk van den Heuvel, *Architecture and the Welfare State* (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 226–227.

[36] Georges Candilis, 'Grouping of Dwellings', in *Team 10 Primer*, 74–76, 76.

[37] Aldo van Eyck, 'Nagele Schools, 1960', in *Team 10 Primer*, 83.

[38] Smithson, op. cit., 76–82.

[39] James Longfield, 'Echoes of Erskine: Reflections on the Working Life of a Citizen Architect in Byker', *Architectural Research Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (2014): 218–33; *Architecture and Participation*, ed. Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu, and Jeremy Till (London: Spon Press, 2005).

[40] Jorge Francisco Liernur, *Arquitectura en la Argentina del siglo XX: la construcción de la modernidad* (Buenos Aires: Fondo Nacional de las Artes, 2001); Ballent, op. cit..

[41] Liliana de Riz and Juan Carlos Torre, 'Argentina since 1946', in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), VIII: 73–194, 115–44; Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. David Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1987: From Spanish Colonization to the Falklands War and Alfonsín* (London: Tauris, 1987).

[42] Yujnovsky, op. cit.

[43] Jorge Francisco Liernur, 'El discreto encanto de nuestra arquitectura, 1930/1960', *Summa* 223 (1986): 60–79.

[44] Liernur, 'El discreto encanto', 61.

[45] Ibid, p.62, my translation.

[46] Beatriz Sarlo, *Borges, a Writer on the Edge* (London: Verso, 1993).

[47] Liernur and Pschepiurca, op. cit., 22–23.

[48] Jorge Francisco Liernur, 'Descolonización y cultura arquitectónica en la posguerra. El caso de Alison y Peter Smithson (1945-1956)', in *Los lugares del saber: Contextos locales y redes transnacionales en la formación del conocimiento moderno*, ed. Ricardo Salvatore (Buenos Aires: Beatriz Viterbo, 2008).

[49] Jorge Francisco Liernur, 'Orientalismo y arquitectura moderna: el debate sobre la cubierta plana', *Revista de Arquitectura* 12 (2010): 61–78.

[50] Aníbal Quijano,'Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina', in *La colonialidad del saber: Eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas Latinoamericanas*, ed. Edgardo Lander (Buenos Aires: Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, 2000), 201–46, 209–211.

[51] Quijano, op. cit., 235–38; Walter Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 47–48.

[52] Liernur, 'El discreto encanto', 68.

[53] Felipe Hernández and Peter Kellett, 'Introduction: Reimagining the Informal in Latin America', in *Rethinking the Informal City: Critical Perspectives from Latin America*, ed. Felipe Hernández, Peter Kellett, and Lea Allen (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 1–19; Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

[54] In addition to the example analysed in this article, see Liernur, 'El discreto encanto', 61-70.

[55] Ilan Kapoor, 'Capitalism, Culture, Agency: Dependency versus Postcolonial Theory', *Third World Quarterly* 23/4 (2002): 647-664.