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O VAZIO SIGNIFICATIVO DO CÂNON THE MEANINGFUL EMPTINESS OF THE CANON

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Abstract

The methodological approach proposed in this article is to suggest some proper ways to establish the existence of the historiographic canon on Modern Architecture. The quantitative and qualitative usage of the works mentioned in the main consecrated historical narratives is considered along with their insertion in the timeline and periodization proposed in each of these sources. An established canon is an a priori immovable feature that challenges any methodological attempt to effectively change it. The inflating of the canon with the insertion of "new" selected information is not enough: it is also necessary to question the very core of the implicit methodological framework of a current canon by understanding how, by whom, and according to which explicit or hidden narratives of prestige and geopolitical power, anything – buildings, urban spaces, facts, authors etc. – is granted a "canonical" status. The consolidated written narratives on Brazilian Modern Architecture history have been selected as a first case study to understand the making of a particularly durable and fixed canon. It is proposed as a starting point to systematically confirm the existence of the canon, and to foster the possibility of change, by contemplating the meaningful voids of emptiness the it obliquely defines.

Keywords: Modern Architecture, Historiography, Bibliographic survey, Architectural theory.

1 Introduction: the meaningful emptiness of the canon

In architectural history theory and practice, establishing the existence of a canon is not an easy task. Although a canon works as a kind of "naturalized" discourse that claims the right of being evident without having to explain itself, it is also and contradictorily enough a hidden feature, never exposing by whom, or according to which explicit or hidden powers the "canonical" status was granted. Besides, as already debated by many authors (Bozdogan, 1999; Gürel and Anthony, 2006; Jencks, 2001; Leatherbarrow, 2001; Lipstadt, 2001) it is not so easy to point out and to clearly define what makes a work "canonical"; and it is even more complicated

to explain, in a rigorous way, what may be called a “canonical narrative”, despite the fact that we all know what we are talking about. By definition, canons are extremely resistant to criticism and change. This article suggests a possible methodological approach to properly tackle the subject of defining what is a canon – or at least, what it comprises –, prompted by some methodological approach cues proposed by Bonta (1977), Torrent (2017) and Lara (2018). By its proper recognition, and by the deconstruction of the prevalent canonical structures, it would be possible to devise some possibilities of change, questioning the very conceptual core of the canonical historiographic narrative, either by broadening the current canon boundaries or by revising and (re) structuring it. The article will also present the application of this methodology in a study in progress, focused on the case of Brazilian Modern Architecture historiographic canon.

2 Modern Architecture and the inception of its canon

From its very early moment, Brazilian Modern Architecture was recognized as a significant and cohesive ensemble of works and authors. A mature narrative reporting its existence and importance was already in construction in the 1930s, and it persists almost unscathed until today. Having started from the effort and merit of its protagonists, it was immediately and providentially reinforced by prestigious foreign help, from the 1940s onwards. This consecrated narrative on Brazilian Modern Architecture is stricken by a paradoxical condition: on the one hand, it longs for its reconnaissance as “modern”, thus aspiring to belong to a broader universal stance; on the other hand, it wants to be qualified as “national”, thus suggesting the attainment of specific traits and a relatively autonomous stance. This double condition confronts and tenses European / North-Hemisphere canonical narratives on modern architecture – not by conflicting but by diverging, though only partially. Almost a century after its inception, despite discreet variations in tone, this need of recognition as “modern and national” remains and prevails in almost every national or international attempt to establish any panoramic narratives on Brazilian architecture – modern, contemporary or otherwise. Its persistence makes it a very interesting and particular case of a lasting canonical narrative that, more often than not, keeps on defining and delimiting, even in the twenty-first century, what is allowed to be considered and understood as Modern Brazilian architecture; and by extension, as Contemporary Brazilian Architecture.

The canonical historiographic narrative of Modern Brazilian architecture was under construction quite at the same time as the establishment of the most widely accepted and “naturalized” canonical historiographic narrative on “Modern Architecture”. Despite sporting the word “Modern” with no other qualifications, its construction was put forward by the help of a selected group of historians of mostly European origin and/ or influence, who assumed the role of organic voices to some of the early twentieth century European avant-gardes. Their task was accomplished in a powerful and efficient manner. Its legitimation was secured in a two-fold way. Firstly, by the temporal extension of this so-called “universal” Modern Architecture groundings backwards, carefully choosing some manifestations to stand as its accepted roots. Secondly, by strictly regulating the conditions for admittance into its selected domain, thus putting any other previous, subsequent and/or parallel non-conform development, in the shadows. While this canonical narrative on “Modern Architecture” was still under construction, its protagonists were actively working on granting it an “official” stand, pushing its dissemination and reverberation through publications and fierce proselytism. The strategy adopted to secure the prominence and command of their particular definition of “modern architecture” was to qualify it as something that, by right, would exclusively belong to the European ambit. To ensure this interpretation, they chose to ground its fulcrum of authenticity, exclusivity, primacy, and market reserve on the adoption of a circumscribed economic, political and social condition, chosen as the one and only legitimate basis for the consideration and interpretation of what “Modern Architecture” should be. This definition established some very tight boundaries to grant a building, or any enterprise the label of “Modern Architecture”, by pairing it with the traits of a restricted given context only applicable to its own case (European and industrialized). Thus, it left outside its realms any “other” manifestation that – given a less restricted or a broader definition of “modern architecture” – would otherwise be included.

The allure of this canonical historical narrative of “Modern Architecture”, one that we have always heard of and deal with on a daily basis without giving it much critical thought, is that we grew so accustomed to it and we naturalized it in such ways that we barely perceive how it is not natural at all. And besides, we fail to perceive how it was founded on a structural mechanism favoring a few and excluding almost all the others. The canonical historiographic narrative on “Modern Architecture” gave centrality to only one supposedly correct and true domain. As so, it precipitously exiled all others nonconforming situations to the category of aberrant phenomena, to be considered at best as curious cases, often as secondary (and non-deserving) ones.

Traveling its own path at that same moment, Brazilian Modern Architecture also built its self-acknowledging narrative and canon by allowing itself to be valued and praised as a significant phenomenon. A process that begins very early in the 1930s (Costa, 1936), in parallel with the construction of the Modern North European historiographic canon. Still, the Brazilian Modern Architecture canon was not built in isolation, either conceptually, or by the voices it enlists, as it counted with the early support of enthusiasts, foreign to its national scope and who have chosen providentially, for varied reasons, to emphasize and highlight its

importance as an internationally noteworthy singularity (Goodwin, 1943; Lara, 2000). Anyhow, and more often than not, its beauty and specialty were commonly displayed as a sort of strange, ambiguous, and curious phenomenon. But even when that classical modern Brazilian architecture is being described by sympathetic outsiders in a cordial way, it is never exactly accepted in a fraternal approach: while foreign appraisal does congratulate it, it still keeps a caution distance from it.

Crisscrossed by a situation of relative autonomy and relative will to belong, the construction of the canonical narrative of Modern Brazilian Architecture adopted a sort of diplomatic mood. Although seeking to affirm its particularity, it did not take distance or isolate itself from the (also recently constructed) other, stronger and soon-to-be hegemonic and self-proclaimed "universal" narrative of Modern Architecture of North European origin; it even draws from its momentum, to improve its own avouchment. Caught in the middle of a contradictory and complex historical situation, it chooses to prop a compromise solution, of perhaps unstable equilibrium. To establish itself as an entity, Modern Brazilian Architecture narratives implicitly accept its exceptional position (meaning as in an "exception") and does not question the very framework in which the so-called general "Modern Architecture" rests. When in fact the latter was never meant to include it, explicitly and implicitly.

Anyway, for not wanting to clash with the other, which was by then the already foremost canon, and by accepting its own epiphytic condition, its protagonists were perhaps driven less by conviction than by strategy. When Lucio Costa invokes the statute of "genius" (Costa, 1951) to reaffirm and explain the existence and validity of this Modern Brazilian Architecture, he guarantees its presence among those he worldly considers as his peers, avoiding to clash, heads-on, with the almost insurmountable barrier posed by the social and economic framework instituted as the criteria to assure the primacy and exclusivity of the European modernity¹. It is even possible that Costa was convinced, as many scholars and professors still are even a century later (as for me, not so much!) that only such state of economic centrality would be equal and congruent with a condition of modernity, and its inescapable and primal condition. Such is the fascination and the magic dexterity of that canon that has been keeping us anesthetized and unable to perceive the bare facts that contradict such interpretation.

On behalf of that, the first fact to be considered is that there is no economic centrality without the existence of its inseparable other, the backward periphery. For such centrality to exist there must be inequality and unbalance elsewhere, enabling the economic active forces to accumulate on one side, by depriving the other sides of their richness. If that is so, "modern" should not be a word to be used to qualify just one of these sides, but the whole system they are inserted in. As much as it hurts to accept it, Modernity is an unbalanced condition, an unequal display of forces whose disequilibrium is not a distortion, but the very condition of its existence. Using the word "modern" to highlight only a bright, happy, and rich side is just a trick, and a bad taste one. With this insight in mind, it gets easier to question to which extent "Modern Architecture" is something that is only possible as a result of a so-called "advanced" condition of economic centrality; or else, if it inevitable and rightfully occurs in any part of the global economic "modern" system. The second fact to be considered are the buildings themselves. A concerted survey on Modern Architecture of the twentieth century, applying less restrictive filters, minding not the geographical position but the dates of design and construction will uncover an enormous amount of most interesting cases all over the world. In Brazil and Latin America, the places I know better, there are certainly a lot of the best and earliest ones. The extent of such acknowledgment survey of architectural modernity or, at least, its manifestations, clearly puts into question the supposition that "modern architecture" would not be allowed to exist outside the context of economic centrality – just because. Therefore, it puts sub judice this supposedly unsurmountable pre-condition, or barrier, from which all "global" or "universal" canonical histories of modern architecture have been construed, including several recent and supposedly critical revisions.

By adopting this line of reasoning some core questions are opened up and need to be put back over the table, to be more carefully reexamined, and some sort of method should be proposed to further assert their validity. Certainly, and again, the questioning of a prevailing canon is not a simple task. Just finding that something is not satisfactory is not enough to fully understand the issue, or even better, to transform it. Even the laborious and straightforward path of organizing a wide-world survey documenting thousands of previously unacknowledged buildings would not suffice to truly challenge the panorama. Canons are very powerful and inertial assets, and this particular canon was erected on a privilege and exclusion basis that is still prevalent and in full force – at least, until it is properly questioned, as has been pointed out by Waisman (2013); Zein (2019, pp. 111, 113) and Heller (2016, pp.44-5).

3 Canon recognition: a possible method

The construction of both canonical narratives – the general, so-called "universal" (actually North-European based and focused) and the particular, so-called "Brazilian" one (actually, a broad generalization from some specific and limited basis) – are dated historical events. But as their prevalence is still ubiquitous today, they

are also a present-day issue. This historicity/present-day dual condition makes them a complex subject to deal with in a comprehensive and systematic way. Besides, the pervasive nature of the canon renders us not quite aware of its presence, and due to its virtual invisibility, we tend to lean on its mandates and boundaries more often than not, even if just for the lack of something else to rest on. Since the canon is seldom evident as a "canon", the first task at hand would be to properly recognize its existence as such. Being a first task does not mean being more important than other aspects, only that a systematic methodological approach to the subject needs to establish some stable and proper foundations before moving forward.

An able device to establish what the canon is or, at least, what it contains, is the systematic documentation of all canonical "examples" that have been repeatedly included in every written source available. That may be done by simply registering all the mentioned buildings, their design/construction dates, their places and programs, their authors, how frequently they appear, in which part of each text's adopted chronology and periodization the buildings and their authors have been considered etc. Since an absolutely complete survey is not quite feasible, a selected experimental but comprehensive enough sample has to be chosen, giving preference to some sufficiently complex cases. To grant its representativeness the sample has to include the more easily accessible books and publications available in technical libraries, bookstores, and online resources; to grant its comprehensiveness, preference should be given to the more broadly panoramic ones. All data extracted from these sources are to be organized in charts and graphics, a most helpful resource when dealing with large amounts of data, bringing forth the possibility of visualizing and analyzing several facts and figures that would, otherwise, not be so easily perceived.

The quantification of the "canonical examples" is proposed as a device to help open up some possibilities of re(examining) the subject of the "canon" by the reverse of the weft, instead of reading the texts in a Cartesian way (i.e., according to the order of their reasoning). When dealing with the most prestigious and well-known books, it helps to look at them again from a refreshed point of view, granting some sort of strangeness to enable the arising of new perceptions and questioning. A book narrative is more easily understood and exposed by examining its inside out. Meaning, by trying to systematically understand how its narrative was construed, which constraints and advantages each author might have encountered in their respective plots, vis-à-vis to his/her adherence and/or contraposition to the 'canon'. Furthermore, by considering in which ways each author chose to privilege and present the structure of his/her narrative, how the "canonical" works mentioned are distributed and balanced within their narrative timelines and periodization – among other analytical possibilities facilitated by the quantified survey.

The comparison of structures and quotations, from one author to the other, helps understand whether and how much the "canon" (or, the list of canonical examples) was established, its recurrence, if and how it has changed in time, and so forth. And in order to truly know what a canon says, and why, it is also important to be aware of what it doesn't do: the absences are as meaningful to understand the structural frame (and biases) of a canonical book, as are the presences. Finally, it is important to stress that the quantification is just a methodological step: it is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, which would be the reconnaissance, and afterwards, the questioning of the making of canonical structures and discourses. As stated above, the aim is to open up the possibility of real consistent change towards a truly inclusive and broad "global architecture history". And for that, it needs a deeper change. It does not suffice to propose the addition of some tactical "inclusions". The opportunistic inclusion of some authors or works, pinched here and there by the fashion waves launched by smart architecture schools and museums from the worldwide panorama, frequently acts as a reinforcement of the existing canon, by mimicking its prestige/privilege procedures. What must be done, if a deep change is to be promoted, is to find ways to reconsider what is or what may be considered as "meaningful". This will only be possible by unveiling the hidden plots and values that root and support the current canonical discourses.

4 Canon recognition: the Brazilian case

The Modern Brazilian Architecture canonical narrative has a noteworthy consistency and duration in time, and it is probably one of the only "regional" cases providing at least a dozen well-known panoramic reviews, written by different authors throughout almost a century. Its precocity and longevity make it an interesting case for an experimental systematic study, as a first step to achieve some meaningful insights on the subject of how canons are established and maintained. Due to the fact that its initial discourses were proposed almost simultaneously with the main "international", European/based, Modern Architecture narratives, it is also an appropriate point of departure to propose a number of international collations, and ultimately, to help put into question the making of the "general" canonical narratives on Modern Architecture.²

	LIVRO	AUTORES	EDITORAS	1ª EDIÇÃO
1	<u>Brazil Builds. Architecture new and old. 1652-1942</u>	<u>Goodwin, P. L.</u>	New York: MoMA	1943
2	<u>Latin America Architecture since 1945</u>	Hitchcock, H. R.	New York: MoMa	1955
3	<u>Modern Architecture in Brazil</u>	Mindlin, H. E.	Rio de Janeiro: Colibris	1956
4	Arquitetura contemporânea no Brasil (1969)	<u>Bruand, Y.</u>	São Paulo: Perspectiva	1981
5	Arquiteturas no Brasil 1900-1990	<u>Segawa, H.</u>	São Paulo: Edusp	1997
6	Brasil: Arquiteturas após 1950	Bastos, M. A. J.; <u>Zein, R. V.</u>	São Paulo: Perspectiva	2010
7	<u>Latin America in Construction</u>	<u>Bergdoll, B.</u> ; <u>Comas, C. E. D.</u> ; <u>Liemur, J. F.</u> ; <u>Del Real, P.</u> (org.).	New York: MoMA	2015
8	Infinito Vão. 90 anos de arquitetura brasileira	<u>Serapião, F.</u> ; <u>Wisnik, G.</u> (org.).	São Paulo: <u>Monolito</u>	2019

Table 1: Selected Brazilian Modern Architecture Books/Catalogues. Source: Ruth Verde Zein, 2019.

The starting point of this critical study on canonical narratives on Modern Brazilian architecture was to choose a relatively narrow, but still ample, selection of books on Modern Brazilian Architecture of panoramic scope, in order to better concentrate and organize the research efforts. The proposed selection (Table 1) includes eight books and/or exhibition catalogues that have been published in different decades. Yet, all of them are still quite accessible nowadays, available in bookstores, in most university libraries, sometimes with easily and legally accessible digitized online versions; and for those reasons, they are often adopted as basic textbooks in architectural education syllabi. In addition to these criteria, the selection also considered establishing a significant minimum number of books necessary to effectively give the survey enough representativeness. Other books that had a very close relationship with the chosen authors/discourses were not included to avoid redundancy. As the research is going to enlist all the works mentioned in each book, the selection of books did not include conceptual or theoretical texts, giving preference to panoramic (in time and places) and works-centered books. The research is also dealing, in a more qualitative way, with a much wider variety of books, articles, testimonies, etc. that are called to the arena on occasion to consider, confirm or reassert the presence of the canon itself, and/or its significant voids.

At this point,³ the research has already organized the preliminary survey of all the buildings and authors mentioned in each and every one of these books. The resulting spreadsheet is currently being revised to confirm its consistency and resolve minor discrepancies⁴. Some of the partial results may be observed in Figures 1 to 5.

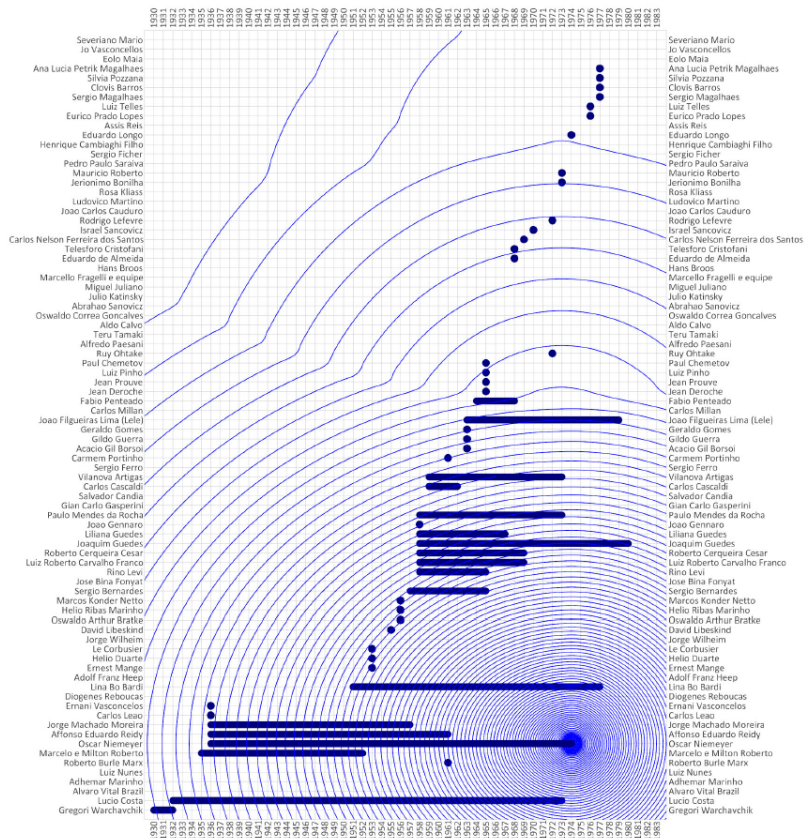


Fig. 1: Number of quotations for each architect x timeline, Book 7 (Bergdoll et al, 2015). Source: Ruth Verde Zein, André Balsini.; Ernesto Bueno Wills, 2019.

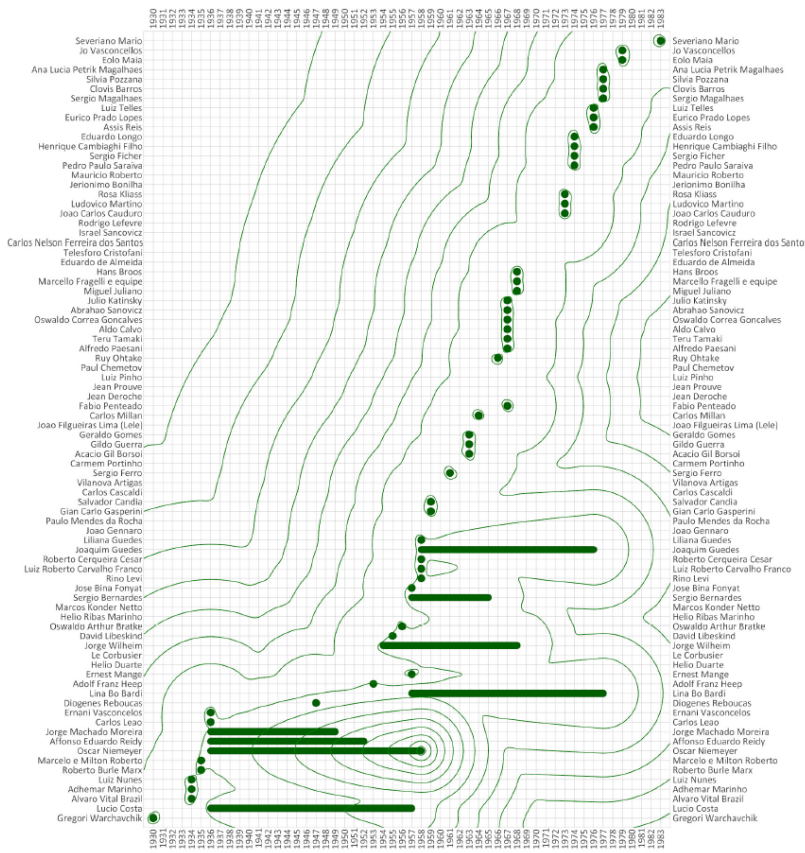


Fig. 2: Number of quotations for each architect x timeline, Book 8 (Wisnik & Serapião,, 2019). Source: Ruth Verde Zein, André Balsini.; Ernesto Bueno Wills, 2019.

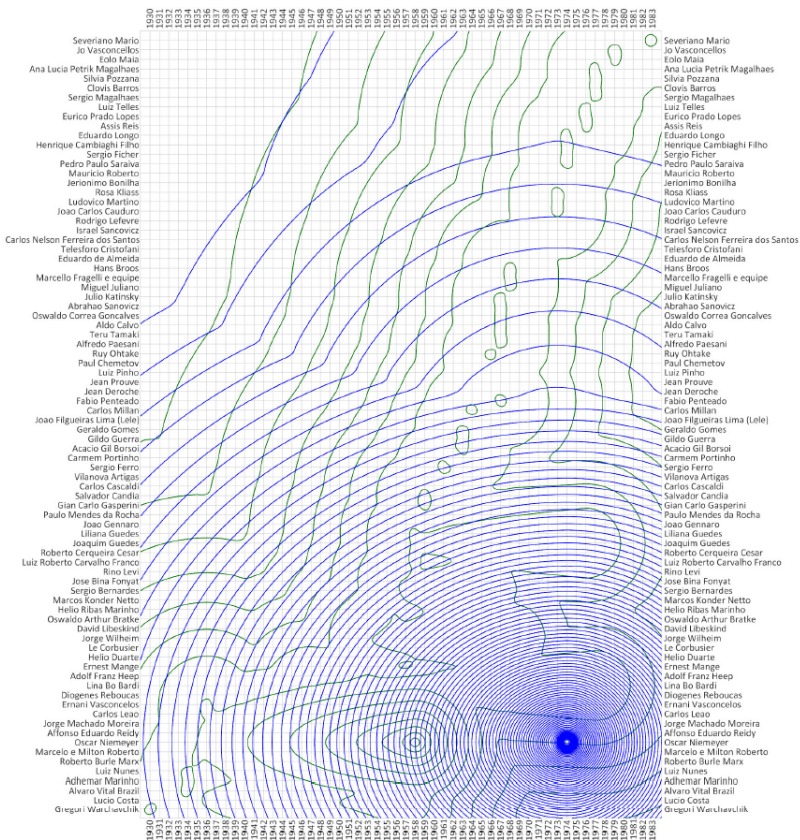


Fig. 3: Number of quotations for each architect x timeline, superposition, Books 7 and 8. Source: Ruth Verde Zein, André Balsini.; Ernesto Bueno Wills, 2019.

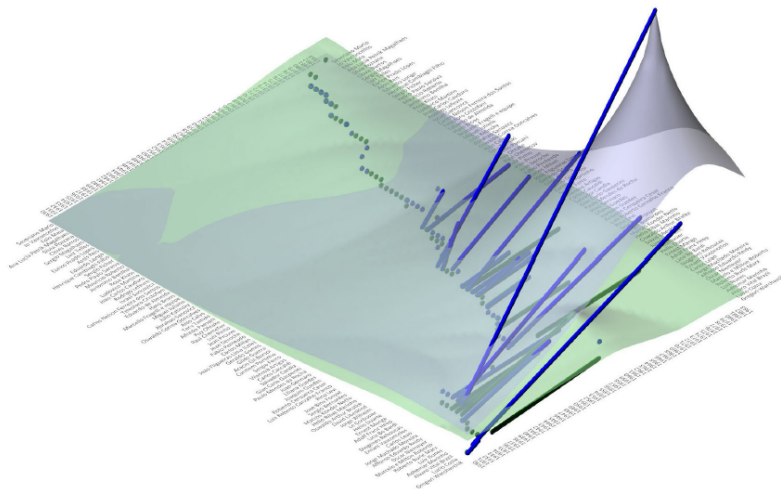


Fig. 4: Isometric Diagram, superposition (Books 7 and 8); each bar shows an architect's quotations along the timeline. Source: Ruth Verde Zein, André Balsini.; Ernesto Bueno Wills, 2019.

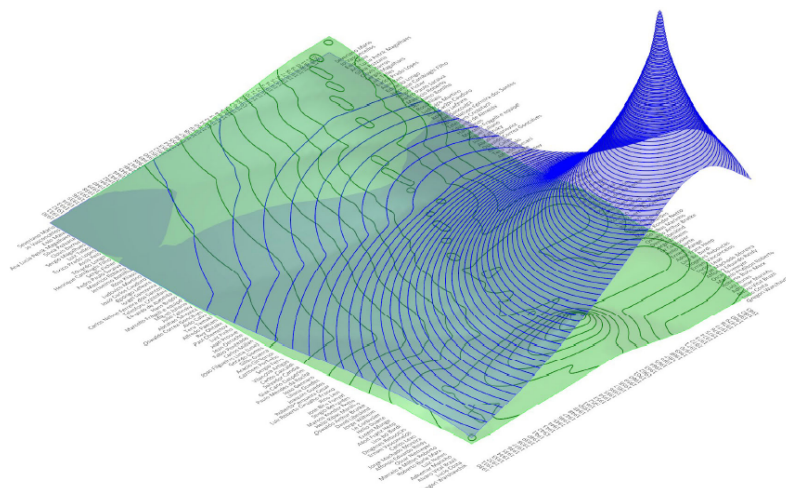


Fig. 5: Isometric Diagram, superposition (Books 7 and 8), resulting contour lines. Source: Ruth Verde Zein, André Balsini.; Ernesto Bueno Wills, 2019.⁵ .

Although the research is still in progress and the results are not completely systematized, their examination has already allowed several working interpretative hypotheses or preliminary inferences. The research is proceeding by the lengthy examination of each book, checking its content, how it is distributed among the decades that each publication comprises, which regions and cities of Brazil are covered, which buildings and authors stand out, how these highlights are treated – among many other aspects.

One of the first findings that stands out is how these “canonical narratives” on Modern Brazilian Architecture present a somehow similar appearance – meaning, they present a high degree of repetitiveness, praising the same buildings and repeating the same stories, once and again. On the other hand, this apparent single-mindedness unison is less tight than it seems at first sight – and the systematic charts containing all the basic information collected is a very useful device to better understand that contradiction. In pair with the similarities, there is also significant differences from one book to another. As always, differences matter, and do have to be carefully considered (instead of being swept under the carpet to favor a “neater” storyline). As so, the examination of the charts content help to perceive that the set of discourses validating canonical narratives on “Modern Brazilian Architecture” and the works selected to reiterate it do not remain completely static along time and through these eight selected books. Even when the same works are mentioned, there are variations – sometimes subtle, sometimes significant – from book to book, from catalogue to catalogue. We may say that the construction of what is here labeled as constituting the “Modern Brazilian architecture” canon, although it presents a high degree of consistency, it leaves room for variation and even for conflicting. However, the constant presence and quotation of the same significant amount of exemplary (and by the way,

magnificent⁶, works, whose presentation is always deeply emphatic, helps elude the perception of these alterities, reinforcing the sensation of an apparent homogeneity. A feature that tends to support the idealistic idea that there is a happy accordance among all voices. It fosters the perception, inside and outside Brazil that a unifying Brazilian Architecture, “modern and national”, univocal and continuous, unfolding along an almost “straight line” of development, is in force since ever and forever. That is obviously a problematic historiographic construction. As nothing remains the same after a century, the prevalence of a single paradigm is a curious anomaly, one that is only attainable by the systematic elimination, disregarding and forgetting of anything other than the stuff that corroborate it.

Canons are defined by their (sometimes mythical) construction and maintained by the inertia thus provided; this is probably an interesting exemplification of that. As so, the proper consideration and understanding of the differences is very important and necessary to overcome the inertial immobility of the canon. Each difference, or “anomaly” have to be appreciated in detail, along with the more general and recurrent information, paying particular attention, in each narrative, to how the warp threads are laid out, how their relative positions and importance are drawn, how the skein threads are woven and how all these conceptual structures are built, assigning different roles to each part of each book’s plot. “Obviously, the establishment of a historical knowledge involves the construction of documentary series. Less obvious is the attitude that the historian must assume in regard to the anomalies that crop up in the documentation [...] Any document, even the most anomalous, can be inserted into a series. In addition, it can, if properly analyzed, shed light on still-broader documentary series”. (Ginzburg et al, 1993, pp.21).

In the case of the “Modern Brazilian Architecture”, the canon seems to have been modeled upon an implicit assumption: a convergence and homogeneity of thought and action among all personages, as a guarantee and proof of the peculiar existence of a “Brazilian way of modern architecture”. This unity, closeness, and homogeneity even seems to exist and be proved in the canonical books. But it is only possible because a much broader reality is reduced and clipped. Even then, it can only remain in existence for a while. But although brief and limited in time and space, its existence supports the canon, providing a secure sense of its credibility. This apparent unity is the result of a policy of exclusion, and its homogeneity is obtained by selecting what it is allowed to be visible.

The canonical definition or delimitation of what is to be accepted as belonging to the canon of Modern Brazilian Architecture has been structured according to a stylistic turn. That is not an uncommon feature, as its prevalence in historiography has been already pointed out by Sarah Williams Goldhagen (2005), when she considers the discourses on “Modern Architecture” (actually, the European based discourses and their derivations). Although it is legitimate to postulate stylistic clippings when making historical narratives on art and architecture – a feature with a large and established tradition – a formal-stylistic approach maintains its legitimacy only when considering a relatively short period of time. Besides, any stylistic definition suggesting the existence of a unity, homogeneity, or at least proximity (or “school”) will always be a precarious and stressed conceptual construction. Even if it may be applied to a collective of examples, it does not necessarily keep on fitting forever, while time passes and/or while considering other places. Postulating a stylistic unity that would encompass all manifestations of “Modern Brazilian Architecture” along a century is probably a hyperbole. As the decades pass, the world, historians, and architects change, new demands are regimented on each occasion, clashing with new manifestations, architecture also changes. What is unique in this case, is not that everything in the world is meant to change, but that despite us all being aware of the instability of the world, the canonical narrative on Brazilian Modern Architecture keeps on being a constant and showing an

On the other hand, the establishment of a canon is an act constituted as a monument of itself, rowing against the current of temporal flow. Paradoxically enough, it is precisely the presence of an established canon that pressures and collaborates to its perpetuation – not only in discourses, but also in professional practice stimulating, in the deeds and thoughts of each new generation, the will of “belonging” to a fabricated, but fascinating “tradition”. Yet, as change is inevitable, what is perhaps being maintained up to Brazilian contemporary architecture, under the overall belonging-to-the-canon-cape, it that the ties with the past are both of continuity and alterity. Again, from the 1930s to-day, there are evident differences; if they are not actually acknowledged or admitted, it is not because they are not there, but because they are being rendered invisible by the uncritical adherence to a previous canonical discourse. Perhaps this degree of selective blindness of authors, readers, professors, and critics on the constantly growing differences between the characteristics of modern and contemporary Brazilian architecture is that we are all choosing to stress the similarities, not the differences. And that again is perhaps a methodologically correct way to clearly demonstrate the implicit existence and/or the presence of a canon.

The subtle but powerful differences unfolding along time and space, from one source to another, raises an additional question. There is a canon – but when it is deeply examined, one realizes its reiteration is not perfect. It does not maintain its consistency in a strict way, it is being engorged by the admission of new works and it displays some differences as well, from case to case. There is a canon – but it is not as unison as it seems to be, for there are changes, even if small ones. How do these changes occur? And since they do, does a canon really still exist? Or is it nullified, tough surviving by the force of the will, like Calvino’s Non-Existent Knight? Anyhow, when considering the understanding of what a “canon” is, or how it presents itself, the question would not be why changes occur, but what happens to make us believe they don’t.

The interest, uniqueness and surprise of deeply studying the Brazilian Modern Architecture historiographic case is that it has helped us to realize how the idea of a supposed unity of “Brazilian Modern Architecture” has been kept unabated. It has been called once and again to the arena, on every occasion, over at least eight decades; and still remains active in the twenty-first century – probably, fostered by the strong desire of perceiving it as a unity. So even if it is partial, the reiteration and repetition of plots and guidelines, with few variations, among the sampling of eight books selected by the research, helps demonstrate the existence of a canonical narrative. It is a most extraordinary phenomenon – although probably, and ultimately, an unsustainable one.

5 By way of a (still in construction) conclusion

The systematic process of recognition of the prevailing canon has to be followed by a proper criticism of its very structure. For that, it is crucial to construct conceptual and methodological instruments to foster more inclusive and contemporary-oriented paths and to stimulate the development of other possibilities of historiographic narrative structures. As so, the research in development is not only a study of particular case, but an attempt to establish a theoretical and methodological framework that would be useful to other researches of similar kind. On the other hand, the systematic study of the current bibliography is meant as a methodological tool to help verify if the possibility of constructing “new” narrative structures do already exist and may possibly be found, albeit in an initial and/or potential state, in the more contemporary (21st century) attempts to establish a more “inclusive global history”⁷, or even inside the cracks and fractures of some existing canonical books.

Anyway, this research aim is not to erase or eliminate the prevailing canon, but first of all, to increase the awareness of its existence, in order to allow its questioning and to possibly foster the emergence of different possibilities. The methodological research steps here proposed, are not driven by the hubris of ignoring or disregarding the accumulation of knowledge that is to be found in the existing canonical writings, even if they happen to be incomplete and/or biased. After all, eliminating any sort of “canon” is perhaps an impossible task, doomed to failure, since the establishment and propagation of a canon may be an inevitable and/or recurrent tool among practice-based research and professional fields – as for example, in architecture (Foqué, 2010). For now, the immediate goal is, at least, to promote a more general awareness of the prevailing canon limitations; and at best, to promote its extension, modification, and renovation.

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1 This argument is further developed in the author's previous writings, e.g. ZEIN, 2019, pp.126-153.

2 Time and life permitting, the second step will be to consider the canonical narratives on Latin American Modern Architecture, before venturing into a systematic worldwide survey.

3 February 2020. The consolidated spreadsheets, the interpretative graphics resulting from that data, and a number of theoretical articles proposing different interpretations and considerations, written by the research partners and guests will be reunited in a book, which is meant to be published in 2021

4As for example, the same building occurring with different names, or authors, or dates of design and completion, or other basic information regarding its identification.

5All figures were conceived and designed in accordance to the research parameters by PhD students André Balsini and Ernesto Bueno Wills, during the research activities of the graduated course "Arquitetura Moderna e Contemporânea no Brasil e Ibero-América", held by the author in 2019 (PPGAU-UPM).

6 It needs not to be said but anyway, let's say it. This is not an attempt to denigrate either the so-called canonical buildings or their authors, neither the historians that organized these books. I am personally a fierce admirer of most of these buildings, I have visited, praised, written and studied the majority of them, to my pleasure and enlightenment. This research is a theoretical effort to try to illuminate what is the twentieth century canonical narratives on Modern Architecture, and how we have to act to favor the achievement of a contemporary, twenty-first century approach to the subject. The research is not against the works that are considered canonical, but against some old beliefs, incrustated in the teaching and practicing of architecture, which may have been hindering the way to a proper change of perspective on the subject.

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7 CAs for example, the most interesting book "Architecture since 1400". (2014) James-Chakraborty, K..