(RE)SEARCH TOWARDS EXHIBITING ARCHITECTURE
A EXPOSIÇÃO DE ARQUITETURA. HISTÓRICO, ATUALIDADE E PERSPECTIVAS.

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The organizers of the conference have asked me to provide a reflection on my experience in exhibiting architecture based on research projects, considering my particular vintage point as scholar/curator, who has worked and is still acting as senior staff in a research institute. It is indeed a unique circumstance which I met in the past five years, having been the Director Research at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) in Montreal, prior to move to become Senior Curator, Head of Architectural Collections at the Getty Research Institute (GRI) in Los Angeles.

I am still too new in my position at the GRI to be able to address complex issues such as research in architecture/exhibiting architecture at the Getty. Nevertheless, in the second part of this essay, I would try to offer a quick overview of the exhibition I am co-curating with Idurre Alonso, associate curator for Latin American Art, within the “Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA” program.

Conversely, at the CCA I was involved in curating an exhibition, which initially originated from the Pierre Jeanneret’s archive, whose acquisition was regarded as a major result. I shall focus my presentation on some aspects of this exhibition, which may describe a very convincing research trajectory in the process of exhibiting architecture.

Another specificity to my experience comes from the fact that both the CCA and the GRI have exhibition spaces, which are specifically devoted to exhibitions on architecture and art related topics though they do not have a permanent collection on display. As a matter of fact, the venue conditions are those of a space whose characteristics are intended to exclusively host drawings, models, and objects to be exhibited temporarily.

What seems more relevant is to underline an epochal transformation that took place at the CCA as well as at the GRI (and this may be very much the case in other research institutes too) in the course of the last decade. The motivations have changed from curating the collections to curating knowledge, transferring the brief from the solely scholarly research to new approaches, which implies the need to make the archival holdings more visible and eventually search for alternatives for reaching the public.

The central issues, as summarized at the conference “Research on Display” (TUDelft & NHI Rotterdam, 2015) are:

- Which formats and typologies of display establish a profound relationship between exhibition and research?

- What is the relationship between archives and knowledge production?

- How can exhibitions combine the accumulation of historical experience and analysis with looking for further expansion?
- How scholars will work in the future considering that the collaborative model is modifying research behavior and the whole concept of authorship?

I am not fully positive that it is possible to create good architecture exhibitions, which are not pure mise-en-scène, or facsimile of the building.

I certainly tried to achieve results of excellence, though my point of departure has never been the architectural object, rather its history, context, materiality, reception. I would say that the research always preceded the subject matter.

What I have experienced is more the exercise of putting on stage a research project allowing the public to engage with the contents it enhanced and the way it was displayed. The educational purpose of such an attempt has seemed to me among the priorities. By the end the exhibition came into being at the convergence of multiple objectives, which embodied its raison d’être far beyond the pure visual result.

When exhibiting contemporary architecture the problem for the curator(s) is quite complex. The most complete manner in which architecture appears is in its built form. This is already a major challenge: Architecture exhibits/perform outside the museum. The building is just not there when the exhibition is on place. The very expensive and complex way of creating architecture inside a museum space remains a challenge and removes architecture from its everyday life and context.

In the most obvious way architecture exhibitions do recourse to derived materials. These include drawings, photographs, scale models, video/moving images, and digital media. The objective is to document how a project/concept/plan developed. This gives some hope not only for exhibiting architecture, but also for understanding it. Yet, architecture inheres in building, but it is not the same as building. If one can distill what is architecture from building, then one can also say that an exhibition is in itself architecture, as it is about building.

The different modes of presenting architecture have developed over the last centuries and their conceptual nature has changed from expositions to exhibitions. Currently architectural exhibitions have turned into documentations of contemporary practices and built forms; they present tendencies. They have become reviews, monographic or thematic evaluations and critical in the manner of art exhibitions. In the curatorial practices of today exhibition is an expository tool that, in showing its content, creates an alternative coherence to offer a new, critical or laudatory, psychological or scientific, perspective.

This is a methodological approach true both in terms of historic exhibitions, as in explorations of contemporary topics in architecture, which more and more frequently foster the influences of new, digital technologies. In the later case the curator can use technical descriptions to
give enough information to viewers to get a decent sense of what the building might be. The exhibition might itself be part of the distillation of architecture from building. Finally, architecture is a form of art, and a tool for prying open what we think, we know, and we experience.

I have participated in the production and presentation of several exhibitions since the late 1970s.

*Funzione e Senso. Architettura casa città in Olanda 1870-1940* was presented at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome in 1979.

![Image of exhibition](image)


It represented my first venture in displaying original documents outside the archive. Hundreds of original drawings together with textual documents, book and journals, and vintage photos were selected from the collections of the Dutch Documentation Center in Amsterdam and critically assembled to narrate the epic of the construction of working class housing and the Dutch modern city. The attention to this modality of displaying architectural history, design and planning received wide attention in Italy and beyond, and resonated in many exhibitions in the following decade.

In this paper I wish to look more closely at two exhibition projects, both deeply grounded in an in-depth research conducted in the holdings of the research institutes I have been affiliated in the past five years.
How Architects, Experts, Politicians, International Agencies, and Citizens Negotiate Modern Planning: Casablanca Chandigarh was presented at the CCA in Montreal in the Fall 2013. The exhibition has been the result of a research project elaborated in collaboration with Tom Avermaete, architectural historian and professor at TUDelft. We also co-curated the exhibition and co-authored the book Casablanca Chandigarh. Reports on Modernization, published by Park Book, Zurich (2014).

The following quotation: Modernity entails several different, competing master narratives, different social forces and conflicts between modernity and anti-modernity, and different cultural contextualization of the past–future contrast. But these different varieties do not simply coexist and challenge each other they are entangled with each other in various ways (Göran Therborn, 1995) is explanatory of the aims of the exhibition:

1. By mapping a new geography of modern urbanism as developed in Chandigarh and Casablanca through the role of internal and external actors, we want to nuance and extend our historical knowledge on the modern city. 2. By focusing on the entangled character of modern urbanism we intend to introduce fresh themes into the contemporary debate, most notably on the position of the designer and the character of the urban project.
The exhibition aimed to foster fresh discussions on modern urbanism as rooted in multiple locations out of western geo-political and cultural boundaries and to develop visions of modernism that engage local particularity without getting stamped with epithets such as ‘derivative’ or ‘mimicry’ —a syndrome that Dipesh Chakrabarty calls “being relegated to the waiting room of history”.

The exhibition aimed to decenter this dominant optic, catalyzing an approach that takes seriously the distinctiveness of modern urbanism and urbanity across the Global South. We intended to contribute to a new geography of the modern city attentive to the entangled
multiplicities of modern urbanism that is to say to the mutual appraisal and interaction across borders.

Against this background the exhibition focused on two different, but complementary urban realities that each in their own way have played a paramount role in the imagination, the definition and redefinition of the twentieth century modern city. On the one hand there is Chandigarh —planned by a team consisting of Le Corbusier, Jeanneret, Frey, Drew and local architects and planners— which contributed to build the myth of the modern city designed by modern architects. The new capital was based on a design approach of ‘particularity’ that relied on the design of very specific and contextual urban morphologies and housing typologies. On the other hand we find Casablanca —conceived by Michel Ecochard and a team of young French and Moroccan architects— which would redefine what the generating conditions of development were in a modern city, introducing concepts such as that of ‘tissue generateur’, eventually moving into the humanized urbanism of Team 10. The planning of Casablanca was largely based on the universalist principle of the grid. Ecochard believed that he could develop a general system of investigation and design that was adaptable to a variety of sites and conditions.

In the course of the development of the planning process the architectural projects that were shown in the exhibition revealed that these were the collective work of professionals from diverse fields as design, engineering, business and politics.

In other words, Chandigarh and Casablanca were not inadequate copies or adoptions, mere translations or distortions, but they had their own logics and might be considered as unique and creative definitions of the modern: they are alternative modernisms (Michael Hanchard) with a strong indigenous basis (Jyoti Hosgrahar).

Chandigarh and Casablanca represented two new and innovative architectural perspectives vis-à-vis modernity that still have some relevance for our contemporary thinking and practice. Both Chandigarh and Casablanca have performed for several decades and both have been appropriated, transformed and redefined by their inhabitants, according to changing conditions, dwelling needs and aspirations.

In the rooms of the CCA the Japanese Atelier Bow-Wow have challenged the relationship between object and meaning, introducing the idea of thematic clusters.

We have exhibited drawings and models; we have used projections, films and other evocations to create a palimpsest of what planning new modern cities meant in a postcolonial context and during the cold war years. We asked two contemporary photographers, namely Yto Barrada and Takashi Homma, to illustrate how Casablanca and
Chandigarh have allowed for several decades now for change, adaptation and transformation.

Finally, I discuss a research project and an exhibition, which are still in progress. *Urban Transfer(s) in Latin America, from Independence to the Threshold of Modernity* is scheduled to be on view August 29, 2017—January 8, 2018 in the GRI Galleries.

The exhibition *Urban Transfer(s)* proposes a visual survey of the unprecedented growth of Latin American capital cities following the seasons of independence, observing how socio-political changes and upheavals activated major modifications in the city scale and the architectural landscape. It points out to the colonial city as the imposed model and the republican city as the negotiated transfer by examining in what way imported influxes were interpreted and subsequently how diverse forms of appropriation of the national colonial and pre-Hispanic past ushered these cities into a process of modernization. During a period that lasted almost eighty years, colonial cities were transformed into monumental modern metropolises, which by the end of the 1920s provided fertile ground for the emerging of today's Latin American megalopolis. Based into an in-depth research in the archival holdings of the GRI, in particular the vast collection of 19th-century photography, the exhibition seeks to present these newly decolonized countries as the modern nations of the new world.

*Urban Transfer(s)* takes the cross-cultural influences as its main core and it gives centrality to the six capital cities –Mexico City, Havana, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Santiago de Chile, and Lima– and to the creation of the multifaceted Latin American identity of modernity. The dominant materials in display are photographs, featuring representations of the Latin American urban conditions in very diverse situations. The photographs are primarily conformed by early vintage prints of city views by some of the most prominent photographers of the time period including Francois Auber, Abel Briquet, Desire Charnay, the Courret Brothers, Marc Ferrez, Augusto Malta, Benito Panunzi, and Charles Betts Waite. The narrative of the exhibition is structured according to a double articulation, with a series of themes organized along a diachronic thread, and a cluster of key words.

The profusion of city views generated mainly during the second half of the nineteenth century highlights the significant interest of the production of this specific type of photography by government entities, commercial companies and local and foreign collectors, and provides us with noteworthy documentation of the transformations and growth of the cities. Next to the photographic documentation, the printed materials will be an eloquent part of the exhibition and will include series of maps, original drawings, and posters, as well as books, travelogues, and professional press. Moving images and sound will also be part of the exhibition through the presentation of excerpts of documentary and fictional movies showing
cityscapes. These clips will also include examples of the presence of neocolonial architecture in American films as an element that gained a mass audience in Latin America and generated a process of assimilation of both architectural features and life style.

In conclusion, what I have learned by curating these exhibitions has transformed my research approach. I am aware of the many purposes of an exhibition, which go far beyond being propaganda and marketing. By collecting and spreading knowledge I have been able to achieve critical results and to question the field. Exhibitions create new meanings and generate attention (if not enjoyment) for architecture engaging the audience in overcoming the boundaries between representation and reality.