Spatial Concepts for Decolonizing the Americas

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Edited by

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and Felipe Hernández

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The intellectual exchanges between Fernando Lara and Felipe Hernandez go back two decades, and their shared roots much deeper. Both were born and raised in South America, notably not in any of its capital cities. Fernando Lara studied architecture at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais in his native town of Belo Horizonte, and Felipe Hernandez got his architectural degree from Universidad San Buenaventura in his native town of Cali. From there they moved to the North in search of their doctorates, Lara getting his PhD from the University of Michigan in 2001 and Hernández finishing his at Nottingham in 2003. Their first collaboration happened in 2004 when Hernández organized a conference around *Transculturation* in which Lara was supposed to present but could not get funding to travel from Brazil where he was teaching to the UK. The next conference organized by Hernández, *Rethinking Informality,* would find Lara teaching at Texas and Hernández in Cambridge, where they finally met in February of 2011. Since then, they have collaborated in a series of publications and events, bouncing ideas against each other and influencing each other thoughts like in the special issue of the Colombian journal DeArq, jointly edited between 2018 and its publication in 2021.

In 2019 they were once again together in a session at the Society of Architectural Historians meeting in Providence, Rhode Island when they decided, over a pint of beer, to organize a Colloquium on Decolonizing the Spatial History of the Americas. The Colloquium was held in Austin, February 10-11, 2020, and it was the last time the authors of this book were together for a conference, only three weeks before the world shut down any travel due to the Covid pandemic. The Colloquium was jointly sponsored by the University of Texas Potter Rose Professorship in Urban Planning, the Graduate School and the Provost initiative on diversity and equity, and the University of Cambridge Institute of Latin American Studies.

The introduction by Hernández and Lara and the seven chapter of this book are the result of the 2020 Colloquium, and we thank the authors Ana Maria Leon, Andrew Herscher, Clare Cardinal-Pett, Zannah Matson, Manuel Shvartzberg Carrió, Luis Carranza and Raksha Vasudevan for their dedication to this project and their patience with our slow and not-steady editorial work.

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INTRODUCTION

FELIPE HERNÁNDEZ AND FERNANDO LUIZ LARA

> *Wiingaashk* [sweetgrass] *belongs to herself. So I offer, in its place, a braid of stories meant to heal our relationship with the world. This braid is woven from three strands: indigenous ways of knowing, scientific knowledge, and the story of an Anishinabekwe scientist trying to bring them together in service to what matters most. It is an intertwining of science, spirit, and story—old stories and new ones that can be medicine for our broken relationship with our land.*[1]
>
> *—Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass*

In her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Kimmerer introduces a number of possibilities to embark on the difficult task of healing the relationship that we, the multiple and heterogeneous residents of the Americas, have established with the broad range of spaces we inhabit and modify. Kimmerer's deeply poetic and knowledgeable prose is not offered as a point of departure but, rather, as a guiding star to lead a challenging and complex process addressing several centuries of oppression and the exclusion of native ecological knowledge. Her work is representative of a whole series of decolonizing currents throughout the Americas, where indigenous groups seek to reassert their presence in the land, as well as their knowledge. Her work intersects that of many First Nations Peoples and Indigenous Groups across the continent. Like Kimmerer, the editors of this volume, Fernando Lara and Felipe Hernández, left their homelands to pursue graduate education in Anglophonic universities, only to spend the rest of their lives pointing out, and attempting to correct, the insufficiencies of the epistemological traditions they inhabit.[2]

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[1] Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2015), x.

[2] Felipe Hernández, *Beyond Modernist Masters: Contemporary Architecture in Latin America* (Basel; Birkhäuser, 2010); Felipe Hernández, "(In)Visibility, Poverty and Cultural Change in Latin American Cities," *Harvard Design Magazine* 34, no. 2

To paraphrase Kimmerer, the texts included in this volume braid together several strings–European scholarship, contemporary indigenous discourses, afro-descendant critiques, feminist theory, and transgender debates, to name a few– in—order to address questions about the role of architecture in the historical production of social inequalities and environmental degradation. To that end, the authors in this volume embrace a number of scholarly propositions spearheaded by academics in different disciplines whose aim is to challenge the singular authority of European knowledge, while revealing the existence of, and intersecting, other epistemological positions in their attempt to welcome the notion of a "pluriverse"–not a singular universe dominated by western knowledge and institutions, but the overlapping coexistence of multiple world-views that present alternatives to the dominant model based on the colonial-modern order: capitalism, racial classification, patriarchy, environmental exploitation, etc. This is not a singular discourse but a series of debates that have not yet permeated fully into architectural academia. These debates, however, provide an opportunity to acknowledge the role of architecture in the production of sustained social inequalities, disparate urban landscapes and environmental degradation. We argue that the rise of architecture, as a unique discipline, on the one hand, and the conquest of the American continent, on the other, are not just chronological coincidences but interdependent variables of the same process of modernization.[3]

Traditional architectural scholarship has not entertained those parallel developments, treating the spatial occupation of the Americas as a consequence of the Renaissance, and as part of a process of European modernization. Ignoring the existence of a growing body of scholarly literature that questions these assumptions, the fields of architectural history and theory focus on the construction and maintenance of a canon, which provides the basis for architectural judgment: what is architecture, and what is not. The limits of the canon, however, are revealed by the (in)famous "Tree of Architecture", presented by Sir Banister Fletcher in his 1903 edition of *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method*, first published in 1896 by himself and his father of the same name. The tree of architecture constructs a history based on a system of ancestry in which the

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(Fall/Winter 2011); Luis E. Carranza and Fernando Luiz Lara, *Modern Architecture in Latin America: Art Technology and Utopia* (Austin: The University of Texas at Austin, 2015); Fernando Luiz Lara, *Excepcionalidad del Modernismo Brasileño* (São Paulo: Romano Guerra Editora, 2019).

[3] Fernando Luiz Lara, "American Mirror: The occupation of the Americas and the Rise of Architecture are We Know it," *The Plan Journal* 5, no. 1 (May 2020). https://doi.org/10.15274/tpj.2020.05.01.5.

northern European styles in the 18th century (Greece - Rome - Gothic - Renaissance) form the trunk, while all other major manifestations are placed on top branches. The lower branches, placed strategically below Greek architecture to represent the "non-historical styles": The Persian, Mexican, Egyptian, Assyrian, Indian and Chinese.

Moreover, the choice of a tree implies stability and strength, presenting the intellectual construction of Western architectural historicity as something natural. In other words, the tree undermines those architectures that cannot be supported by history –the non-historical styles–creating a system of scholarly exclusion that is still used today. A decolonial perspective such as the one we embrace in this book following the work of theorists like Anibal Quijano, Arturo Escobar, Walter Mignolo or Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, amongst numerous others, enable us to engage a much broader base for the historical study of contemporary architectures throughout the Americas. Surpassing the limitations of Fletcher's tree. We seek to include local pre-Columbian traditions such as the Toltecs, Aztecs, Mayans, Paracas, and Incas, to mention on a few. Their traditions have always influenced architecture in Central and South America, while having a significant impact on the image of our cities.

In the Mediterranean, the Phoenicians, the Ottomans, the Maghribs and the Eastern Orthodox building traditions contributed directly to architectural heritage of former Spanish and Portuguese colonies. More recent scholarship examines other intersections with Persian, Mughal, Hindi and Confucian construction knowledge. For this reason, we find it imperative to review existing concepts under a new light, approaching them decolonially. The idea of the braid referenced by Robin Kimmerer in the twenty-first century, or the notion of transculturation coined by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortis in the 1940s, as well as other terms such the rhizome introduced by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri, amongst others, seem much more appropriate to refer to the complex historical interactions that precede contemporary architectural practices in the Americas. Spatial knowledge is complex and therefore any attempt to simplify it would inevitably lead to exclusion and reduction.

It seems appropriate here to say a few words about the origin of this scholarly project. In April of 2019 during a break from the 72nd Meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians in Providence, Rhode Island, the editors of this volume met to plan further collaborations. We envisioned a colloquium in Austin, Texas that would bring together twenty scholars working on Decolonizing the Spatial History of the Americas. The event was held in February of 2020, with generous support from The University of Texas School of Architecture and the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Cambridge. Twenty-three scholars from several countries came to Texas, including keynote speakers Arturo Escobar, Clara Irrazabal-Zurita, and Felipe Hernández.

The event was successfully in creating stronger links with decolonial discourse, and more precisely, with the work of a range of scholars who have developed a critical and very useful terminology to challenge the narrow approach to architectural history supported methods such as Fletcher's.[4]

As articulated by Walter Mignolo,

> [T]o find one's own way one cannot depend of the words of the master; one has to delink and disobey. Delinking and disobeying here means avoiding the trap of colonial differences, and has nothing to do with the rebellious artistic and intellectual acts that we are used to hearing about in European history. In the history of Europe reactions against the past are part of the idea of progress and of dialectical movement. In the non-European world it is a matter of delinking.[5]

In selecting the seven chapters that comprise this volume we subscribe to Mignolo's ideas of delinking and disobedience, and found inspiration in Verboamerica, an exhibition held at the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA), where curators Andrea Giunta and Agustín Perez Rubio reorganized the entire permanent collection around concepts that make more sense on this side of the Atlantic: Outskirts, Crowds, Emancipation, Violence, Work and Bodies. The result is an exhibition that places Alfredo Jaar and David Alfaro Siqueros in one room; Diego Rivera and Mira Schendel in another. *Spatial Concepts for Decolonizing the Americas* offers an opportunity to explore other ways to approaching architecture in the American continent. The essays in this volume problematize the complicated histories of architecture and urbanism in the Americas revealing the existence of multiple –often competing– epistemological systems. Some of them uncover the participation of the excluded subjects of modernity –Indigenous groups, African descendants, mixed race people (pardo, mulato, mestizo, trigueño, etc.), women, Muslim, and so on– who made modern architecture possible and who, indeed, have built most of our cities, where they live.

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[4] Fernando Luiz Lara, "Urbis Americana: Thoughts on our shared (and exclusionary) traditions," preface to *Urban Latin America: Images, Words, Flows and the Built Environment*, ed. Bianca Freire-Medeiros and Julia O'Donnell (New York: Routledge, 2018), x-xv; Fernando Luiz Lara, "A Stitch in Time," *Architectural Review* 1465, October 2019; Hernández, Felipe and Fernando Lara. "Arquitectura de Colombia vista desde fuera. Una breve introducción," *Dearq*, no. 29 (January 2021): 6-11. https://doi.org/10.18389/dearq29.2021.01; Lara and Hernandez CAAD UTexas 2021.

[5] Walter D. Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 7–8 (December 2009). https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409349275.

Other essays discuss how private developers and the government, separately or jointly, continue to implement segregationist urban practices throughout the continent. A third type of essay reveals the obsolescence of existing methods or architectural historicization which prevent the inclusion of other forms of thinking about space, its construction and the ways in which it is inhabited. As such, this book problematizes the univocality of architectural history, bringing in different perspectives and positions that represent the heterogeneous reality of a pluri-ethnic and multicultural continent, a continent whose contemporary condition cannot be dissociated from its colonial past. Decolonizing, however, is a diffuse concept. Decolonizing, *per se*, does not specify an outcome. It sets out a broad agenda that implies reacting against a colonial authority, but its objectives, methodologies, and outcomes may be different for different groups.

Therefore, it is necessary to both declare and accept the limitations of this very precise decolonial endeavor by architectural academics at western institutions in North America and Europe. Emphasis on the disciplinary aspect of this scholarly endeavor is fundamental in order to acknowledge the positionality of the authors, and editors, who were trained as architects and teach in departments of architecture in the Global North. As the chapters in this volume clearly demonstrate, our commitment to decolonial discourse is genuine, as is our interest in developing alternatives to architectural pedagogy (history, theory) and practice. However, it would be presumptuous to assume that we speak on behalf of, or give voice to, excluded subjects throughout the Americas who not only have their own voices, but have also developed their own strategies to be heard. In other words, we enter decolonial debates understanding that there is no single or predetermined objective, nor can the outcome of the decolonial enterprise be anticipated.

The decolonial agenda is a collective enterprise and we ought to recognize our place within the collectivity, while acknowledging that there may be other subjects for whom "decolonizing" has different and, perhaps, immensely more significant consequences. Within such a clear disciplinary context, this volume explores the notion of space, which has been central in architecture and urban studies. Space is approached from seven different concepts, each of which presents an opportunity to study it in connection to an inescapable colonial past. The aim of this volume is, therefore, to unsettle the colonizing implications embedded in concept of space by making visible the terms in which it was deployed to control populations during colonialism, and remains an expression of the coloniality of power in cities today.[6] In the first part of this introduction we explore the notion of "decolonial thought," which is central to the decolonial agenda, and to decolonial theory more generally.

We believe that "thinking decolonially" provides opportunities to develop alternative ways to theorize space, and to delink the spatial history of the Americas from its colonial structures. To elucidate the importance of thinking decolonially, and the possibilities that it brings to architectural scholarship, we draw on the work of leading figures of the decolonial movement in Latin America, attempting construct productive interdisciplinary connections between fields that still remain apart. In the second section of this introduction we refer to a more recent set of circumstances that have affected the world since we met in Austin to initiate this conversation: Covid-19. The virus that infected, and has caused the death of, millions of people around the world testing us in the hardest possible way. Alarmingly, the pandemic has reiterated a global geography of inequality that is inextricably connected to the colonial-modern order.

Indigenous and Afro-descendant groups throughout the Americas have suffered disproportionately from the virus than other groups. Their suffering is not only the result of greater propensity to infection but, mainly, due to the poor conditions of habitation, which facilitate the transmission. Ethno-racial minorities throughout the Americas have lost jobs and income, or have been forced to continue working in perilous conditions that expose them to infection. Moreover, minority groups often have less access to health services and, thus, are at greater risk of dying. The spaces of contagion in our cities, in our nations, and in the world, are connected to a colonial-modern matrix of injustice that needs to be explored from a decolonial perspective as well.

In the third part of this introduction we explore the nature of the seven spatial concepts we use to enable a decolonial approach and introduce each chapter of the volume, describing the terms in which they are part of our collective effort to embrace decolonial discourse with the purpose of reviewing the architectures of our continent.

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[6] Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (March 2007), https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353; Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Ramón Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality," *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 1 (2011): 1-36, https://doi.org/10.5070/T411000004.

Decolonial Thinking

In architectural discourse the concept of space is conceived as a receptacle, or container, that needs to be given form, and architecture fulfils the form-giving function.[7] Discussions about space in the 1980s and 90s referred to philosophers like Descartes, Kant, Leibniz and Hume in order to elucidate the meaning of space and the role of the architect in giving it physical form and appearance. It is true that parallel debates at the time challenged the abstract nature of such an interpretation of space, proposing that *place*, rather than space, should be the subject architectural enquiry. According to this position, held by theorists who adhered to phenomenology –invoking the work of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and others– *place* stands for "lived space" and, as such, it includes the experiences of people rather than merely its abstract characteristics. While both schools of thought were influential and stimulated important debates about architecture and its socio-cultural function, they were decidedly embedded in western epistemology.

Moreover, these two positions came to dominate architectural debates globally, in such a way that they continued to occlude other possible definitions of space, spatial practice and spatial experience. For that reason, architecture can be perceived as a colonizing discourse that occludes other forms of thinking, making and living. Decolonial thinking, as a form of practice, requires that we develop the mechanisms to engage those other definitions and experiences excluded by architecture as colonizing discourse, a form of western knowledge. Abstraction is a key concept because it ties together the development of Cartesian thought –cogito ergo sum as the marker of a separation between "mind/white/male" and "body/nature/other," or the thinking subject and the savage– with the rise of architecture as an independent discipline. In other words, architecture emerges as a distinct discipline during a period of increasing rationalization that led to a complex process of global stratification in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[8]

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[7] See for example, Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press,1994); Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leeser, *Chora L Works: Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997).

[8] For a detailed discussion about abstraction in the context of decolonial theory see Lara, "American Mirror."

The argument we want to posit here is that the occupation of the Americas during these two centuries intersect the rise of both rationalism and architecture, in such a way that architecture would serve as a vehicle to implement "order" in the new continent –as Angel Rama argues in his seminal book *La ciudad letrada*. More importantly, the notion of decolonial thinking originates in the work of Latin American scholars, particularly Gloria Anzaldua, who introduced the notion of border thinking in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza.*[9] Subsequently, the notion has been used by other scholars such as Enrique Dussel, Arturo Escobar, Ramon Grosfoguel, Maria Lugones, and, perhaps most prominently, Walter Mignolo.[10] The importance of decolonial thinking lies on the fact that it attempts to surpass theoretical deconstructions of colonial structures –for example Bhabha's and Spivak's focus on the narrative construction of colonial authority– offering alternatives to connect with other existing systems of thought.[11] In that sense, decolonial thinking refers to the continued existence of multiple forms of knowledge, enabling us to address other ways of living and inhabiting the world, as well as other traditions of space production.

The notions of decolonial and border thinking are important in the attempt to decolonize the spatial history of the Americas because it demands "thinking from the outside." While this could be seen as a loose definition, the notion that distance allows perspective is not new in critical scholarship. In this case, for example, we argue about the possibility of approaching space through decolonial discourse, and architecture from other disciplinary view points, is a resource to enable alternative interpretations of space in relation to a colonial history that determines its use today. It could also be useful to review the seemingly univocal history of American architecture, seen and written almost exclusively from within: by architects and architectural historians. It seems relevant here to mention a joint project by the editors of this volume entitled, "Colombia from the Outside," which materialized in an issue of the international architectural journal *Dearq*, published by the Faculty of Architecture at Universidad de los Andes in Colombia.[12]

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[9] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute books, 1987).

[10] Enrique Dussel, "Beyond Eurocentrism: The World-System and the Limits of Modernity," in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies," 1-36; María Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (Fall 2010): http://www.jstor.org/stable/40928654; Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*.

[11] Homi K. Bhabha, *The location of culture* (Routledge, 2012); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak?," *Die Philosophin* 14, no. 27 (August 2003): 42-58, https://doi.org/10.5840/philosophin200314275.

In light of the attention given to Colombian architects, politicians and institutions for the successes of architectural and urban projects in Bogotá, Medellin and other cities in the country, the issue is devoted to examining the opportunities inherent in the external perspective to advance architectural knowledge. The history of Colombian architecture has been written, primarily, by a handful of middle-class, white-mestizo, academics linked to Universidad Nacional in Bogotá, which was not only the first, but also remains one of the most prestigious schools of architecture in the country. As such, they approach the rural as an externality: the opposite of modernity. The 29th issue of *Dearq* introduces the potential to approach Colombia architecture from the outside, not only geographically (outside of Colombia) but also disciplinarily. On reflection, however, what we did not do –and were unable also to attain in this volume– was to enable an approach to architecture from the perspective of excluded subjects: Indigenous, Afro-descendants, and the rural poor.

As we emphasize at the beginning, it is important to draw attention to this absence in the context of an attempt to embrace a decolonial agenda to review the production of space in the Americas through an architectural perspective. As we wrote in the introduction of *Dearq* 29, quoting Santiago Castro Gomes, "if we continue to represent ourselves" according to the rules of modern Western knowledge, we are reinforcing, in an epistemic key, the same mechanisms of colonial domination' that have relegated us to subalternity.[13] In fact, following Enrique Dussel, of whom we are making a paraphrasis here, the time has come in Latin America to move to more complex positions that allow us to connect the architecture with its context, not only the physical context but its contexts social, cultural, economic, ethnic and others.[14]

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[12] See Hernández and Lara, "Arquitectura de Colombia vista desde fuera," 6-11.

[13] Santiago Castro-Gómez, *Crítica de la razón Latinoamericana* (Bogotá: Universidad Javeriana (2017 [1996]), 152.

[14] Enrique Dussel, *Filosofías del Sur: Descolonización y Transmodernidad* (Mexico: Akal, 2015), 44.

Spaces of contagion

When we held the conference *Decolonising the Spatial History of the Americas* at the University of Texas, Austin in February 2020, little did we know about the impact that Covid-19 would have all over the world. At the time, only one speaker was unable to attend the event because of the virus: he was refused entry into the United States because he had been in China the previous month. The rest of us flew from Europe, and several regions across the Americas including Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico. We congregated in Austin, and for many it was the last conference where we met physically. Since then, people in all those countries have experienced hardship, and many aspects of our lives are being tested in the hardest possible way.

Millions of people are becoming ill, thousands have tragically passed away, and many others have suffered from Covid-19 in other ways, unable to visit their children, their parents, or their friends. That is not to mention the increasing number of those who have lost their jobs, their financial stability, their capacity to support themselves and those they feel responsible for, and with it, their sense of self-confidence and believe. A great deal of all these people comprises the excluded subjects of modernity: the indigenous and the African descendants in all countries throughout the Americas. As such, Covid-19 has reiterated the existence of structural differences we had been able to ignore for years, even though inequalities stood right before our eyes. The British newspaper *The Guardian* reported that "The death rate in the US from Covid-19 among African Americans and Latinos is rising sharply, exacerbating the already staggering racial divide in the impact of the pandemic which has particularly devastated communities of color."[15]

On January 8, 2021, an article published in *The New York Times* indicated that "racial health disparities represent a vast, structural challenge in [the United States of America], made all the more stark by the raging pandemic. Black, Latino and Native Americans are infected with the coronavirus and hospitalized with Covid-19 at higher rates than white Americans, and they have died of the illness at nearly three times the rate, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention."[16] Back in

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[15] Ed Pilkington, "Covid-19 death rate among African Americans and Latinos rising sharply," *The Guardian*, September 8, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/08/covid-19-death-rate-african-americans-and-latinos-rising-sharply.

[16] Roni Caryn Rabin, "Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith Takes Aim at Racial Gaps in Health Care,", *The New York Times*, January 8, 2021,

June 2020, *The Guardian* reported that “Covid-19 first hit Brazil’s white upper classes, who brought it back from abroad. Now the virus is scything through the country’s poorer suburbs, favelas and low-income towns such as São João de Meriti – where 63% of the population self-declared as black or mixed race in Brazil’s last census in 2010.”[17] Similar reports are found about many countries in the rest of South and Central America.

The point we are at odds to make here is that such racial disparities confirm the fact that cities throughout the Americas retain segregated forms of urbanization that can be traced back to their colonial origin and Covid-19 has made such disparities starkly visible. If Covid-19 exposes the spatial condition of racial disparities in urban areas throughout the continent –as well as rural-urban divides that have been much less explored by the international press, but are evident nonetheless– more recent debates about access to vaccines disclose global disparities between the wealthier countries of the north and those in the south.[18] Recent reports by the United Nations and the World Health Organization indicate that poorer countries will struggle to receive vaccines and, indeed, may not be able to initiate effective vaccination programs until 2024.[19] In other words, the Covid-19 pandemic also reaffirms a global disparity connected to what Walter Mignolo call the darker side of modernity. The colonial difference that turns formerly colonized nations into a burden, reiterating that the lives of their citizens have a lesser value in the broader scheme of a contemporary global economy, just as they did 500 years ago.

More alarmingly, the article titled “Delayed Covid vaccines for poor countries ‘will leave Europe vulnerable for years,’” converts the tragedy of billions of poor people in the Global South into a threat to Europe. The article cites the United Nations Humanitarian chief, who maintains that “poorer countries are unlikely to gain substantial access to Covid-19

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https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/08/health/coronavirus-marcella-nunez-smith.html.

[17] Dom Phillips, “‘Enormous disparities': coronavirus death rates expose Brazil's deep racial inequalities,” *The Guardian*, June 9, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/09/enormous-disparities-coronavirus-death-rates-expose-brazils-deep-racial-inequalities

[18] The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development has published extensively about the impact of Covid-19 in rural areas, and the challenges to manage the crisis across these areas.

[19] See Peter Beaumont, “Scheme to get Covid vaccine to poorer countries at 'high risk' of failure,” *The Guardian*, December 16, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/16/scheme-to-get-covid-vaccine-to-poorer-countries-at-high-risk-of-failure;;

vaccines until the latter half of next year, meaning wealthier European countries could still remain vulnerable to new waves of infection for years."[20]

Covid-19 also provides an opportunity to address colonial responsibility in the transmission of diseases during the 16th and 17th centuries. Indeed, the population that are currently suffering from the pandemic, are the same that perished due to the arrival of diseases brought by the European during colonization. Indeed, the notion that the mild diseases like the common flu, measles or chickenpox were responsible for the deaths of thousands of Native Americans and slaves throughout the continent, has often been deployed to minimize the violence of colonialism, which includes the massacre of millions of indigenous people by the Spanish, the Portuguese, the English and the French.

Current responses to Covid-19 stress the sense of social and political responsibility in transmitting the virus. Countries have close international borders, while imposing internal lockdowns to prevent the spread, imposing hefty fines for breaking the rules. As such, the transmission of diseases does not exonerate European colonizers for the deaths, and near complete destruction, of indigenous populations. By referring to spaces of contagion we want to bring to the fore a closely connected issue we would have been able to address in February 2020. Yet, it has become a very relevant issue given the inherent spatial aspects that Covid-19 has unveiled.

For that reason, we believe it is imperative to examine the impact of the pandemic from an architectural and urban perspective, but also to approach the challenge decolonially, connecting it with the historical circumstances that precede the pandemic. The ethno-racial minorities that are suffering now disproportionally from Covid-19 were there before the global spread of the virus and had suffered disproportionately from in many other ways.

Space Through Seven Concepts

To be sure, there are multiple studies about space as an administrative device during colonialism.[21] Most of these books refer to the English and French colonial enterprise in India, Africa and the Middle East. However, in his influential book *La ciudad letrada*, Angel Rama advances an interesting argument about the way in which scientific knowledge dictated the spatial organization of the American colonies. He argues that American cities and the territories that surround them were the result of an emergent rationalism that took place in Europe during the Baroque period. In his view, the newly discovered territories provided the first opportunity to build perfectly organized cities that reflected the emergence of a new global system: the colonial-modern system supported by capitalism.[22]

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[20] Patrick Wintour, "Delayed Covid vaccines for poor countries 'will leave Europe vulnerable for years,'" *The Guardian*, December 23, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/23/delayed-covid-vaccines-for-poor-countries-will-leave-europe-vulnerable-for-years.

[21] See (Dossal, M. *Imperial Designs and Indian Realities. The Planning of Bombay City, 1855-75* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991); Keith, Michael. *After the cosmopolitan? Multicultural cities and the future of racism*. (Routledge, 2005);

Since the construction of new and perfectly ordered cities was not possible in Europe "where the stubbornly material sediments of the past encumbered the flight of a designer's fancy" this dream was translated to the Americas, where the use of an orthogonal grid would be the tool to build not only ordered cities but also ordered societies under the authority of the colonizer.[23] The grid (concept one) can be seen as the materialization of the new social order envisaged by Baroque European politicians, thinkers, and planners (see Ana María León and Andrew Herscher). In Rama's own words:

> From that flow of knowledge sprang forth the ideal cities of the Iberian empires' American vastness. Their ordering principle revealed itself as a hierarchical society transposed by analogy into a hierarchically design urban space. It was not the real society that was transposed, of course, but its organized form, and not into the fabric of the living city, but merely into its ideal layout, so that into the geometrical distribution we can read the social morphology of the planners.[24]

The rationalization of space through the use of the grid is inherently linked to the colonial enterprise, as well as to the construction of a stratified society in which people were allocated a place according to their position in a system of extraction and exploitation: an emergent global capitalist system. Indeed, grids permit not only the physical organization of space, but also its commodification. Through the use of grids, land becomes property that can be quantified, purchased, bequeathed, and also expropriated. The ordered distribution of land also facilitates administration, taxation, and, more importantly, the distribution of bodies on the land to facilitate the exploitation of resources. As such, an analysis of colonial urban grids in the Americas could help to develop the argument advanced by decolonial theorists who underline the connections between colonialism, modernity and capitalism, which cannot be understood separately.[25]

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[22] For a detailed discussion of *La ciudad letrada*, see Felipe Hernández, "Dynamic identities and the construction of transcultural architectures" (PhD Thesis, University of Nottingham, 2003), http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/11323/1/289076.pdf.

[23] (Rama 1996:2)

[24] (Rama 1996: 2)

Moreover, the fact that cities in the Americas appear either as ports to facilitate colonial trade, or were founded as outposts of territorial occupation to cement the colonial presence, means that they undermined pre-existing social organizations and the patterns of land use that local peoples had established. Roberto Fernandez elaborated in his book *El Laboratorio Americano* that America was a laboratory where Europe experimented with modernity through a monstrous negation of specific histories so that only space now existed.[26] Bringing our discipline into the core of the problem, Fernandez continues by stating that "the systematic but not total destruction of vernacular cultures in the Americas demanded an instantaneous architecture, cities multiplied by fiat (*doquier* in the original Spanish), not as consequence of rural concentration as in Europe since the early middle ages, but as centers of control and management of productive hinterlands."[27]

Thus, by replicating in the Americas the systems that gave rise to European cities –although in a geometrically ordered manner– the symbiotic relationship that native peoples had developed with the environment was also undermined; as Clare Cardinal-Pett explains in her chapter in this volume. Cardinal-Pett explains how a decolonial effort requires architects and architectural historians to study pre-colonial systems of land occupation and use. The main argument is that pre-colonial systems of land occupation and use, ought not to be approached as archaic, that is, as representing obsolete practices that oppose current systems that operate under capitalist conditions, but rather as alternatives to remedy social inequality and environmental degradation. Cardinal-Pett is the author of *A History of Architecture and Urbanism in the Americas*, which offers a comprehensive survey of the story of architecture and urbanism in our continent from 15,000 bce to the 20th century.[28]

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[25] As Lara reminds us, the process of abstraction that separates the *minds* of white males from the *bodies* of everything non-white and non-male is both a tool and a consequence of the colonization of the Americas. It gave us Spanish *dameros* and the Jeffersonian grid, as well as Monge's descriptive geometry and the ability to design objects by manipulating only two dimensions: plan, section and elevation.

[26] Roberto Fernández, *El laboratorio americano: Arquitectura, Geocultura y Regionalismo* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1998), 11.

[27] Fernández, *El laboratorio americano,* 20.

Indeed, each one of the seven chapters explores a concept that links space to the matrix of power inherent in coloniality. Agriculture (concept two), for example, is intrinsically connected to spaces such as the plantation, which in turn reveals further connections to slavery. Yet slavery cannot be seen as feature of the past that we have overcome. Even if we were to assume that slavery has been legally eradicated –an argument that presents its own challenges– it would be extremely hard to question the existence of racism, economic deprivation and social exclusion of Black populations throughout the Americas, conditions which evolve from former practices of slavery: its afterlife, to paraphrase Fanon.[29] The implementation of agriculture during colonial times connoted specific techniques of using space for the harvesting of different crops in such a way that land throughout the Americas had to be re-distributed in order to sustain systems of mass production. Indeed, the Martiniquais psychoanalyst, activist and scholar Franz Fanon wrote extensively about “the plantation” as a space of dehumanization where Black slaves were subject to unimaginable cruelty for the purpose of sustaining colonial production and the extraction of other resources.[30] More recently, the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe has advanced compelling arguments about “the plantation” as a “third space” that reveals the colonial-modern *necropolitics*, a political system in which the life people had less value than the crops their bodies cultivated and harvested.[31] Moreover, forests were cleared in order to make space for large monoculture plantations degrading the enormous biodiversity of different regions across the continent. Local systems of production, irrigation and distribution, which had existed for millennia, were destroyed to satisfy European requirements under a new global economic system. As such, no study of the spaces of agriculture in the Americas could be detached from such a dark history.

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[28] Clare Cardinal-Pett, *A History of Architecture and Urbanism in the Americas* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2016).

[29] Franz Fanon, “In the Caribbean, Birth of a Nation,” in *Franz Fanon: Alienation and Freedom*, ed. Jean Khalfa and Robert J. C. Young (London: Bloomsbury, 2015 [1958]).

[30] Felipe Hernández and Ángela Franco, “Urban Spaces of Fear and Disillusionment,” in *Cities, Capitalism and the Politics of Sensibilities*, edited by Adrián Scribano, Margarita Camarena Luhrs and Ana Lucía Cervio (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021).

[31] Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

The notion of image (concept three) brings to the fore the question of aesthetics. As posited by many decolonial theorists, colonialism was not simply a system of administration but also an epistemic and aesthetic one. It dictated taste, beauty and social acceptance, just in the same way that it condemned certain populations to primitivism, or barbarism; and in many cases these two coincided. In other words, native peoples and African slaves, along with their languages, religions and cultural traditions represented the abhorrent. Even in modern times, and in the realm of architecture, the so-called primitive is judged to be criminal, and their practices of ornamentation seen as examples of backwardness.

That was the argument advanced by Adolph Loos in his influential essay *Ornament and Crime* (1913), exemplified by images of tattooed Papau New Guineans, to underpin his moralist call for a new modern aesthetic free of ornamentation.[32] Indeed, throughout the twentieth century, but more acutely in the period between 1930 and 1960, modern architecture was used by governments and white-mestizo social elites throughout the Americas in order justify the relocation the poor –a category that intersects large sections of the African diaspora throughout the Americas, as well as indigenous or Native American populations and those of mixed race– to decent social housing tenements such as Pruitt Igoe in St Louis, USA, or the Unidad 23 de Enero in Caracas, Venezuela, to mention only two of numerous tenements built throughout the continent. As Arturo Escobar argues potently, the twentieth-century notion of development coincides largely with the principal tenets of colonialism which, in this case, imply not only the implementation of a specific economic system, but specific kinds of urbanism, architecture, and modes of habitation. Modernist housing schemes attempted to invisibilize poverty and the poor (who represented underdevelopment, debauchery and the abject) in order to convey an image of modernity.[33]

Zannah Matson's chapter in this volume illuminates the role of landscape representation, and its use to construct and sustain images primitivism and barbarism, as well as practices of exclusion. Marston maintains that the idea of nature –as the opposite of culture and reason– is thus linked to the idea of the "non-white" and the "non-male" in order to create conundrum of otherness which endowed the figure of the "white man" with the greatest authority. Water (concept four) emerges as a valuable resource, indeed a fundamental one in the projects of colonial extraction. It is necessary in agriculture, mining, transportation, or to support life in rapidly growing urban centers. Thus, access to, and ownership of, water sources remains one of the most contentious issues in contemporary debates about indigenous rights. As such, water ceases to be simply a valuable resource, and becomes a key component of policies and practices of space distribution.

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[32] Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime* (London: Penguin, 2019 [1913]).

[33] See Hernández, "(In)Visibility," 66-75.

Often ignored in architectural debates we want to reframe the relationship between water and space in order to reevaluate the terms in which landscape has been historicized. Manuel Carrió uses the artificiality of Palm Springs, California, to discuss the visibility of fabricated landscapes, such as golf courses, and the invisibility of the conflicts and exclusions that made possible the construction of a water infrastructure capable of sustaining modernization processes in the desert. Little effort is required to connect the notions of labor and race (concepts five and six) to theorizations of space under colonialism. Indeed, the three concepts have been central to decolonial discourse since the 1960s. The Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano establishes the inextricable connection between labor, race and space in his studies of colonialism in the Americas, arguing that "race became the fundamental criterion for the distribution of the world population into ranks, places, and roles in the new society's structure of power [capitalism]".[34] In the Americas indigenous populations were confined to serfdom and the Black were confined to slavery, while the Spanish (white), established themselves as the dominant race and could receive wages, be independent merchants, artisans or farmers.[35]

Of course, these were no clear-cut classifications, yet they formed the basis of a complex distribution of legal rights, and also space, with significant impact on the consolidation of the colonial city. The argument articulated here is that such a spatial distribution can still be perceived today in the fact that Afro-descendants (Black) and indigenous populations remain poor, under-represented and excluded from the dominant economic system. Indeed, these groups are the most likely residents of urban peripheries in contemporary cities throughout the Americas. As such, labor, race and space form a conceptual triad that is central in decolonial debates. In this volume, Maria Gonzales Pendás tackles both labor and race in her analysis of Felix Candela's work in Mexico and Peru.

The main argument exposes the terms in which Candela's ability to build his beautiful shells at a few cents per square foot was only possible by exploiting indigenous and Afro-descendant workers who were underpaid and exposed to unsafe conditions. Luiz Carranza, for his part, discusses the influence of José Vasconcelos seminal book, *La Raza Cósmica*, on Mexico's early twentieth-century avant-garde movements. The book argues that Americans are mixed-race, while retaining the notion that the benefits of miscegenation are principally found in the elimination of darker skin tones. Finally, gender (concept seven) offers an opportunity to expand debates that have been dominated by western academia. While gender has offered a tremendous opportunity to address disparities between men and women, and has also enabled the theorization of LGBTQ+ subjects, it has remained firmly embedded in the western scholarly tradition.

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[34] Anibal Quijano and Michael Ennis, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (September 2000): 535.

[35] Hernández and Franco, "Urban Spaces of Fear and Disillusionment," 217–234.

The Bolivian sociologist, Indigenous Rights activist and author Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, has been a fierce critic of gender theorizations which suggest that the oppression of women has universal characteristics, having the same effects on women across all cultures around the world.[36] As such, gender discourse "colonizes women", depoliticizing gender –as well as race, and class– struggles in the different parts of the Americas. The chapter by Raksha Vasudevan touches precisely on the intersectionality of gender and race when discussing the spatial negotiations of a transgender Black woman in an informal settlement in Santo Domingo. It is worth noticing, however, that gender discourse has failed to engage LGBTQ+ question in relation to indigenous populations. While there is a growing literature on the intersection between LGBTQ+ and the African diaspora in the Americas, the intersection with Indigenous peoples remains largely unexplored.

The special dimension of this aspect of the debate is less tangible but no less significant for we speak about the existence of a geopolitics that excludes the experiences and realities of certain groups, who remain peripheral to academic discourse. As such, in this book we do not intend to reconceptualize space. Instead, the essays in this volume approach the concept of space decoloniality, that is, they highlight the power relations, and social exclusions, inherent in the concept of space as it is used in architectural discourse. In order to approach the concept of space decoloniality we draw on a central tenet in decolonial theory: "decolonial thinking." Considering that one of the main challenges of the decolonial agenda is to decolonize knowledge, to do "justice against the epistemicide" of colonialism and coloniality –to use de Sousa Santos words– it is essential that we confront the neutrality inherent in modern (as well as modernist and modernizing) conceptualizations of space.

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[36] Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa. On Practices and Discourses of Decolonisation*, trans. Molly Geidel (London: Polity, 2020). Cusicanqui refers both to the differences between, and specificities of, female experiences, as well as feminist discourses and practices, in Central America the Andes.

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