

Atlas

Global Architecture
circa 2000

THIS BOOK intends to be a critical assessment of world architecture in our global times: both a 'state of the art' and a 'state of the planet', centered on the period opened by the Fall of the Berlin Wall. After a short introduction on Spain as a laboratory of global architecture, ten long chapters written by prominent experts explore the different regions of the world. Each section is rounded off with the detailed publication of three representative works of the area in question, completed between 1990 and 2007, that is, circa 2000. The world regions mapped in this survey follow closely the civilizations identified by Samuel P. Huntington in his classic work of 1996, though geography has suggested fragmenting what he calls Western Christendom in three chapters – Western Europe, North America, Australia and the Pacific –, besides granting chapters of their own to Russia and Eastern Europe, and to Latin America. However, this distribution of convenience does not demand endorsing his thesis that the fundamental source of conflict in the post-Cold War world will be cultural (a point of view tragically reinforced by 9/11 and its aftermath in Bali, Madrid, London or Bombay), and neither does it imply that religious and cultural fault lines are more important than the homogeneity brought about by the process of globalization, with the spread of sprawl and spectacle as the two main traits of the contemporary urban and architectural landscape.

Following the inclusive approach of conceptual history (and thus paying a fitting tribute to the recently deceased Reinhart Koselleck, who developed *Begriffsgeschichte* in half a century of research), and applying its methods and attitude to architectural concepts, the book suggests avoiding the misleading opposition between tradition and modernity, exploring at the same time the singularity of events and the regularity of patterns, thus paying due attention both to buildings created by specific circumstances (site, program, budget, client, architect) or to territories shaped by the layering of human occupation on a peculiar combination of topography, vegetation and climate, and to works made interchangeable by the contemporary Esperanto of spectacle or to landscapes made indistinct by the pervasive diffusion of sprawl. Preferring the descriptive to the normative, and balancing stability with change, this choral book also hopes to shed light on the concepts of memory and collective identity, so often channeled through architecture and memorials, and always ideologically tinted: globalization is indeed a *grand récit*, using the words of Jean-François Lyotard, but the experience of modernity has also hatched a swarm of displaced, marginalized or defeated identities, so perhaps the global and the local are in the end as intertwined as Empire and multitude in the counter-canonical master narrative of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt.

The essays that cover architectural and urban developments in each area of the planet since 1989 – and that together should offer a rough picture of what Goethe would have called *Weltarchitektur* – are supplemented with three close-ups of particular buildings, thereby trying to link what the literary critic Franco Moretti ironically describes as 'distant reading', with its stress on the historical and social forces that can be shown in 'graphs, maps and trees' (precisely the title of his book on abstract models for theory), with the inevitable 'close reading' of individual works whose singularity cannot be explained away with quantitative history, geographical patterns or evolutionary connections. Under the spell of Moretti's monumental *Il romanzo*, this effort of international collaboration modestly hopes to take a step towards the *Kollektivsingular* of Koselleck, his vision of history as a convergence of stories, which in the case of architecture also combines the universal idiom of images with the specific languages of the authors. A global approach that presents common tendencies and regional variations; a conceptual history that gives equal weight to continuity and innovation; and a cosmopolitan conversation that balances the sociological brushstrokes of 'distant reading' with the formalist detailing of 'close reading'. These were the coordinates under which this project was launched, and readers will judge if the purpose has been achieved. LFG