

### **Objetivos postergados. Reescribir La arquitectura moderna desde 1900**

*El proceso de concepción, escritura y revisión de La arquitectura moderna desde 1900 podría ser objeto de un estudio interesante según William J.R. Curtis. Después de la publicación de la primera edición (1982), apareció una segunda (1987) con un prefacio y capítulo al final sobre la arquitectura reciente. En la tercera edición (1996), el contenido sufrió una revisión y expansión; una integración de nuevas investigaciones en su discurso narrativo sin precedentes en la historiografía de la arquitectura moderna. Aunque la arquitectura moderna de países fuera de Europa y los Estados Unidos ya aparecía en la primera edición, no es hasta la tercera que Curtis cumple con su objetivo de mostrar el significado de la arquitectura moderna en partes remotas del mundo. Este artículo presenta la historia de la escritura del libro y propone analizar los cambios introducidos como objetivos que Curtis cumplió con un retraso de quince años.*

*Palabras clave: Arquitectura moderna, historia, historiografía, William J.R. Curtis, revisión*

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*The process of the conception, writing and revising of Modern Architecture Since 1900 would make an interesting study, according to William J.R. Curtis. After the first edition published in 1982, a second edition appeared in 1987 with a preface and an addendum on recent architecture. In the third edition (1996), the content was massively revised and expanded; an unusual integration of new findings into the overall synthesis. Although modern architecture in countries outside of central Europe and the United States already appeared in the first edition of the book, it is not until the third that Curtis fulfilled the objective to show what modern architecture may mean in remote parts of a rapidly changing world. This essay presents the story of the writing of the book and reflects on the changes introduced in the third edition understanding them as objectives that Curtis achieved with a delay of fifteen years.*

*Keywords: Modern architecture, history, historiography, William J.R. Curtis, revision*

Macarena de la  
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## Delayed Objectives

*Rewriting Modern Architecture Since 1900*

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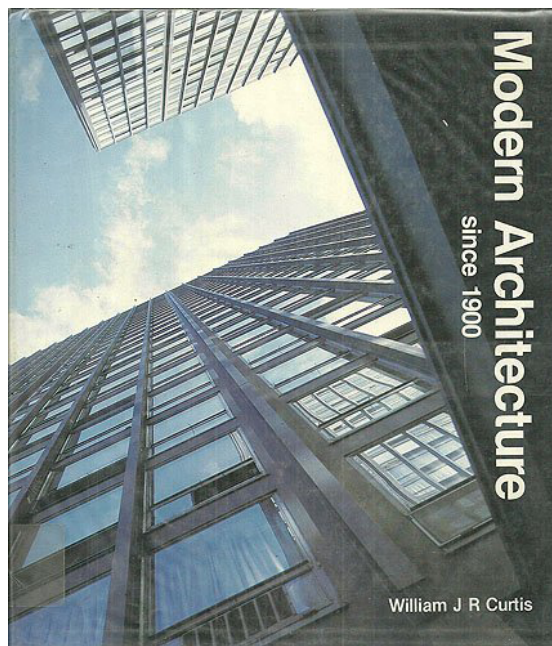


Figure 1. Cover of the first edition of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (1982).

### **The Story of the Writing of *Modern Architecture Since 1900*<sup>1</sup>**

«The day I handed in the grades; I received a letter from Phaidon Press asking if I might be interested in writing a general book on the history of modern architecture. It was too good to be true and I accepted. This was the starting point for *Modern Architecture Since 1900*» (Curtis 2017).

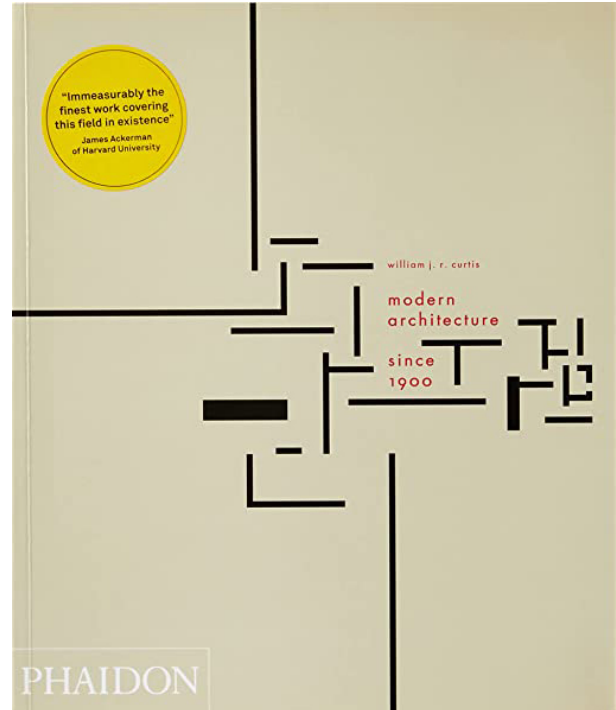
*Modern Architecture Since 1900* was the result of a commission from Phaidon Press to William J. R. Curtis in 1978 (figure 1). The process of its conception, writing and revising would make an interesting study (Curtis 2014: 151). After the first edition published in 1982, a second edition appeared in 1987 with a preface and an addendum on recent architecture. More than a decade after the book first appeared, Curtis published the third edition (1996). Here, instead of extending the

conclusion, or adding an extra chapter at the end, the content was massively revised, expanded, and redesigned. This scale of revision is unusual in architectural historiography: other histories of modern architecture were merely updated with extra chapters, as was the case with Kenneth Frampton's *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (1980) until its latest edition (2020). This essay aims to shed light precisely on this unusual revision, as part of a larger project that acknowledged his contribution to the historiography of modern architecture.

There are few mentions of the book in broad historiographical studies. For example, Marvin Trachtenberg lists Curtis's book as one of the recent surveys which fill out the chronological and geographical spectrum of modern architecture in a nearly complete manner. He describes it as «the most compre-

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hensive and 'neutral' of the modern surveys, as against the more ideologically loaded histories by Tafuri and by Frampton» (Trachtenberg 1988: 222). The book is listed with precisely those histories, Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co' *Architettura Contemporanea* (1976) and Frampton's *A Critical History* (1980), as the three more recent studies of modern architecture in the conclusion of Panayotis Tournikiotis' *The Historiography of Modern Architecture* (1999). In addition, there is one historiographical unpublished study of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* written shortly after the publication of the third edition and entitled "Arquitectura: entre Tradición e Invención" (Architecture: between Tradition and Invention) written by the researcher Germán Hidalgo Hermosilla. With Le Corbusier as a main character in the narrative, and Denys Lasdun as a perfect example of the relationship between innovation and tradition, for Hidalgo, Curtis's approach to history favoured continuity rather than a rejection of the past informing his understanding of tradition.

However, until the research presented in this essay was conducted, there was no monographic study of his writing in the style of Sokratis Georgiadis' and Detlef Mertins' studies of Sigfried Giedion, or Nigel Whiteley's and, more recently, Todd Gannon's books about the writings of Reyner Banham. None of the essays that Curtis published in the intervening years between editions on

modern architecture, regionalism or post-modernism appear in the anthologies on architectural theory of the turn of the century. Curtis was also omitted from Detlef Mertins' overview of architectural history writing in the introduction to his book *Modernity Unbound: Other Histories of Architectural Modernity* (2011: 7). *Modern Architecture Since 1900* has been omitted from, or misrepresented in, recent catalogues and bibliographies, and, despite the full revision the content underwent in subsequent editions, recent studies on the history of modern architecture often still refer to the first edition of the book. There is a lack of acknowledgment of the changes Curtis introduced to the third edition of *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, and no previous discussion of its relevance. This essay aims to fill the gap presenting the story of the writing of the book, its reception and dissemination, analysing the changes between the first and third editions, and reflecting on the implications of such a revision.

Curtis used research material he had collected for his own teaching practice and during his trips throughout the world and wrote the book «between early 1980 and early 1981» (1996: 6). These trips would take place around his teaching commitments at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, and included «several expeditions to places as diverse as Greece, Turkey, Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and India, with a particular interest in Islamic archi-

Figure 2. Cover of the second edition of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (1987).

Figure 3. Cover of the third edition of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (1996).

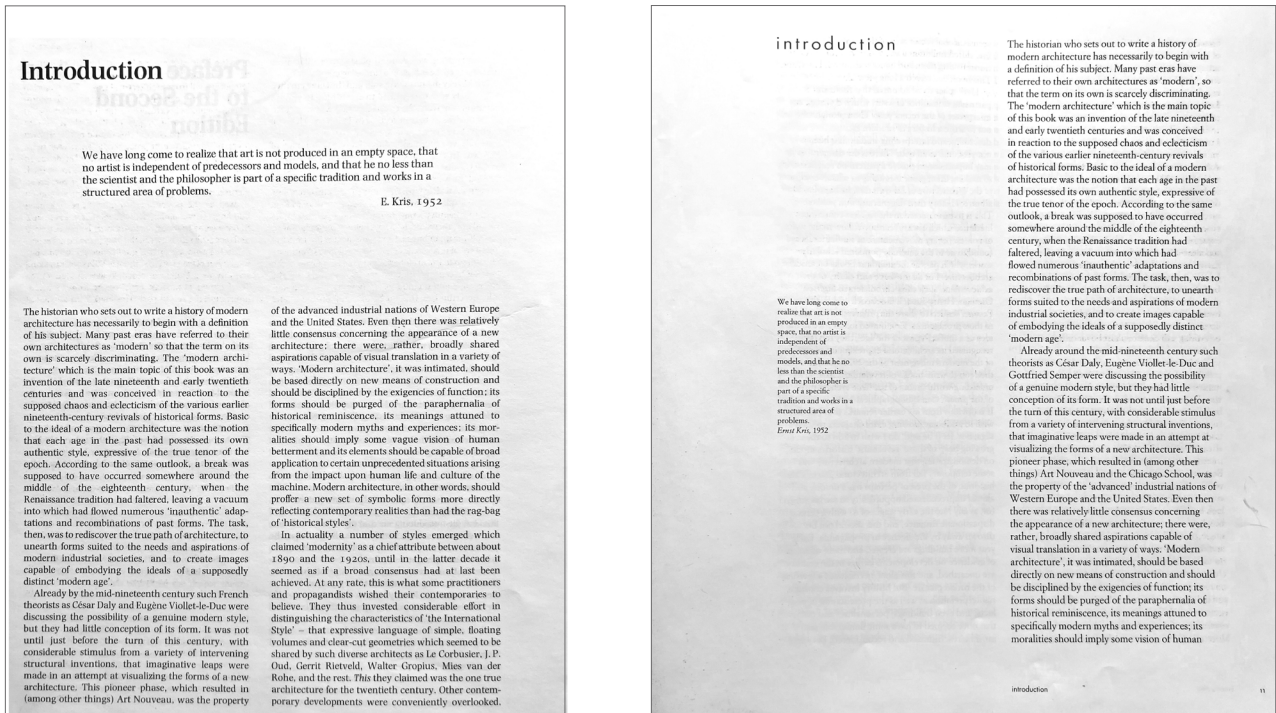


Figure 4. Differences in the formatting and design of the first page of the introduction of the first and third editions of *Modern Architecture Since 1900*.

ecture. The photographs made during these trips became integral to [his] teaching,» and subsequently to the book (Curtis 2017: 88). The aim was to present a «balanced, readable overall view of the development of modern architecture in other parts of the world from its beginnings until the recent past,» emphasizing the theoretical roots of modern architecture rather than its emergence and ensuing development (Curtis 1996: 13-14). For him, previous historians had neglected the later phases of modern architecture, especially since the 1960s and around 1970. Quite deliberately, he wanted «to show what modern architecture may mean in remote parts of a rapidly changing world» – a world which he was actively visiting and charting (1996: 6). He aimed at studying that modern architecture «with a dispassionate distance» placing authenticity at the core of his research and leaving ideology aside (1996: 12).

Curtis wrote the preface to the second edition (figure 2), published in 1987, from Ahmadabad, the sixth largest city in India, where he was writing a book on the Indian architect Balkrishna V. Doshi (1988). For this second edition, the book remained unchanged except for the addition of an addendum entitled ‘Search for Substance: Recent World Architecture,’ based on primary research and first-hand experience of the buildings. Curtis claimed to have fought against «the drift of critical opinion then current, avoiding the usual, but misleading postures

concerning ‘modernism’ and ‘postmodernism’ (1996: 691). In 1995, from his family house in Cajarc, South of France, Curtis admitted then that the time had «come for some major additions and revisions» (1996: 9). The third and, so far, definitive edition appeared in 1996, and was the result of an examination which started in late 1993 (figure 3). The revision process proved the book to be an evolving project, a working hypothesis, which must be tested, reordered, and refined (Curtis 1996: 9). He recalled: «The creation of the third edition has been a massive undertaking for all concerned – author, publisher, editors, picture researchers and designer – and represents something like a collective act of faith. When Richard Schlagman took over Phaidon Press in 1990, he and his new architectural editor David Jenckins immediately expressed interest in the long-term future of this book. The initiative for a new edition came at the right time, as there was just about the distance necessary to allow a major revision» (1996: 10).

He also praised the publisher for the notable inclusion of 800 new images, the editorial craft of Bernard Dod and the formatting and design of Isambard Thomas (2007) (figure 4). The aim with this third edition was to integrate new available knowledge and new experiences into the existing structure of *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, focussing on themes and notions which had been left underdeveloped. That new knowledge included literature on modern architecture, ranging from

detailed monographic studies on individual buildings and architects some resulting from retrospective exhibitions to theoretical speculations on different aspects of architecture. Curtis argued that the intention behind the revision of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* was «to reveal more of the original soul while giving a better shape to the body» given that «the need remains for texts charting large-scale developments» (1996: 9).

### The Reception and Global Dissemination of *Modern Architecture Since 1900*

For Curtis, revising the book was just as difficult as writing it in the first place, as it required «self-criticism and the desire to re-examine entrenched assumptions» (2015b: 477). In revising *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, Curtis considered both formal and informal criticism by others. He admitted: «On the whole, the first edition of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* was given a warm reception by reviewers in its various language editions. But there were several useful criticisms. I did listen when told that not enough was said about Mies van der Rohe, about the city, about the inheritance of nineteenth-century ideas and about the architecture of the Spanish-speaking world» (1996: 692).

It is worth revisiting the parts of that critical reception that relate to the introduced changes.<sup>2</sup> Samuel B. Frank was one of the critics denouncing the unevenness of treatment between, for instance, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe as a result of the variation of scales of Curtis's approach (1983: 30). Writing in 1996, Jorge Sainz praised Curtis's «characteristic style,» which combined general exposition of main lines of thought with detailed description of the most emblematic cases (73). In his review of the Spanish version of the first edition of the book, Sainz highlighted the pluralism or variety of Curtis's methodological tools to chart the modern tradition. According to him, Curtis used diverse intellectual media and approaches, which, «in some cases, generate a general and distant overview of an entire stream of modern architecture, whereas in others, present with a closer image of certain works or architects» (Sainz 1987: 8).

Sainz was one of the reviewers who analysed the rewriting of *Modern Architecture Since 1900*; he did so by highlighting the additions and changes introduced to the 1996 edition. Andrew Mead agreed with Sainz that the third edition is considerably different, both in content and appearance. In compar-

ing the editions, Mead also pointed out that what «remain constant, and give this history its strength, are two things in particular: the relatively extended treatment Curtis gives to certain keywords, allowing him to develop his argument by attention to specifics and to explore several layers of meaning; and his marked distaste for '-isms' in place of 'authenticity'» (Mead 1996: 51). Sainz also emphasised the improvement in the quality of the reproduction of the graphic material for the third edition, something which differentiated Curtis's book from other similar scholarly books. Sainz noted that, in the third edition, «colour appears generously and abundantly not only in the pictures of buildings (increased both in number and quality), but also in drawings and paintings» (1996: 73). Mead considers the third edition to be «much enhanced, with over 800, well-reproduced colour and black-and-white photographs which serve rather than supplant the text (plans are still only occasionally provided)» (1996: 50-51).

However, before moving on to analysing the changes in detail, it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* in other languages worldwide, itself a global reality. The subsequent impact of Curtis's book as a key academic textbook or survey on modern architecture was the result not only of several editions and reprints, but also of its translations into several other languages. In 1986, the first edition of the book was translated into Spanish,<sup>3</sup> and some years later the third edition (2006),<sup>4</sup> a translation which has been praised as «superb» by Curtis himself (2007). The translations into German and Japanese appeared soon after the publication of the first Spanish edition, in 1989 and 1990 respectively.<sup>5</sup> There have been translations into German,<sup>6</sup> Italian,<sup>7</sup> French,<sup>8</sup> and Portuguese.<sup>9</sup> According to Curtis, «there is in fact a Chinese version of the third edition of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* published by China Architecture and Building Press» (February 21 2017). However, I have not been able to confirm this point. As with the English editions, these translations have been repeatedly reprinted over the last forty years resulting in the book having a global impact. As Curtis put it: «The book enjoyed a positive reception from the word go. It crossed frontiers and enjoyed many thoughtful reviews. It won some awards, was rapidly adopted as a basic text in many universities around the world (...). For the author the book was like an international passport, and it opened many doors. But it also became part of an identity

Figure 5. Table comparing the contents of the first, second, and third editions of *Modern Architecture Since 1900*.

1982	1987	1996
Preface	Preface	Preface to the First Edition
	Preface to the Second Edition	Preface to the Third Edition
INTRODUCTION		
<b>Part 1: The Formative Strands of Modern Architecture</b>		
1.The Idea of a Modern Architecture in the Nineteenth Century		1.The Idea of a Modern Architecture in the Nineteenth Century
2.The Search for New Forms and the Problem of Ornament		<b>2.Industrialization and the City: the Skyscraper as Type and Symbol</b>
3.Rationalism, the Engineering Tradition, and Reinforced Concrete		3.The Search for New Forms and the Problem of Ornament
4.Arts and Crafts Ideals in <u>England</u> and the USA		4.Rationalism, the Engineering Tradition and Reinforced Concrete
5.Responses to Mechanization: the Deutscher Werkbund and Futurism		5.Arts and Crafts Ideals in <u>Britain</u> and the USA
6.The Architectural System of Frank Lloyd Wright		6.Responses to Mechanization: the Deutscher Werkbund and Futurism
7.Cubism and New Conceptions of Space		7.The Architectural System of Frank Lloyd Wright
9.Cubism, <b>De Stijl</b> and New Conceptions of Space		<b>8.National Myths and Classical Transformations</b>
<b>Part 2: The Crystallization of Modern Architecture between the Wars</b>		
8. Le Corbusier's Quest for Ideal Form		10.Le Corbusier's Quest for Ideal Form
9. Walter Gropius, German Expressionism, and the Bauhaus		11.Walter Gropius, German Expressionism, and the Bauhaus
10. Architecture and Revolution in Russia		12.Architecture and Revolution in Russia
11. Skyscraper and Suburb: <u>America</u> between the Wars		13.Skyscraper and Suburb: <u>the U.S.A.</u> between the Wars
12. The Ideal Community: Alternatives to the Industrial City		14.The Ideal Community: Alternatives to the Industrial City
13. The International Style, the Individual Talent, and the Myth of Functionalism		15.The International Style, the Individual Talent, and the Myth of Functionalism
14. The Image and Idea of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye at Poissy		16.The Image and Idea of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye at Poissy
15. Wright and Le Corbusier in the 1930s		<i>17.The Continuity of Older Traditions</i>
16. Totalitarian Critiques of the Modern Movement		<b>18.Nature and the Machine: Mies van der Rohe</b> , Wright and Le Corbusier in the 1930s
17. The Spread of Modern Architecture to <u>England</u> and Scandinavia		<i>19.The Spread of Modern Architecture to <u>Britain</u> and Scandinavia</i>
18. The Continuity of Older Traditions		<i>20.Totalitarian Critiques of the Modern Movement</i>
		<b>21.International, National, Regional: the Diversity of a New Tradition</b>
<b>Part 3: Transformation and Dissemination after 1940</b>		
19. Modern Architecture in <u>America</u> : Immigration and Consolidation		22.Modern Architecture in <u>the U.S.A.</u> : Immigration and Consolidation
20. Form and Meaning in the Late Works of Le Corbusier		23.Form and Meaning in the Late Works of Le Corbusier
21. The Unité d'Habitation at Marseilles as a Collective Housing Prototype		24.The Unité d'Habitation at Marseilles as a Collective Housing Prototype
22. Alvar Aalto and the Scandinavian <u>Tradition</u>		25.Alvar Aalto and Scandinavian <u>Developments</u>
23. Louis I. Kahn and the <u>Challenge of Monumentality</u>		<b>26.Disjunctions and Continuities in the Europe of the 1950s</b>
24. Architecture and Anti-Architecture in <u>England</u>		<b>27.The Process of Absorption: Latin America, Australia, Japan</b>
25. The Problem of the Regional Identity		<i>28.<u>On Monuments and Monumentality</u>: Louis I. Kahn</i>
26. <u>Crises</u> and Critiques of the Modern Movement		29.Architecture and Anti-Architecture in <u>Britain</u>
27. <u>Modern Architecture</u> and <u>Developing Countries since 1960</u>		30. <u>Extension</u> and Critique in the 1960s
28. The Traditions of Modern Architecture in the Recent Past		31. <u>Modernity, Tradition and Identity</u> in <u>the Developing World</u>
CONCLUSION. Modernity, Tradition and Authenticity		<b>32.Pluralism in the 1970s</b>
	ADDENDUM. The Search for Substance: Recent World Architecture (1987)	
<b>Part 4: Continuity and Change in the Late Twentieth Century</b>		
		<b>33.Modern Architecture and Memory: New Perceptions of the Past</b>
		<b>34.The Universal and the Local: Landscape, Climate and Culture</b>
		<b>35.Technology, Abstraction and Ideas of Nature</b>
		CONCLUSION. Modernity, Tradition, Authenticity

**Bold:** new chapters of the third edition, or new parts in a title and chapter

*Italics:* chapters that have been moved in the third edition

Underlined: words that have changed in the titles of the chapters between the first and third editions

and corresponded with my decision to guard a degree of distance from academia which so easily falls prey to intellectual fashions» (2007).

The global impact of the book in architectural history education, both in terms of sales and very early translations into other languages, in part prevented the book from being considered a scholarly contribution to the historiography of modern architecture worthy of study, and the changes introduced in the third edition from being acknowledged.

### **Analysing the Revision of *Modern Architecture Since 1900***

In the first and second editions (figure 5), apart from the introduction, conclusion, and the addendum to the second edition (1987), Curtis organised the content into twenty-eight chapters: seven in Part 1 'The Formative Strands of Modern Architecture', eleven in Part 2 'The Crystallization of Modern Architecture between the Wars,' and ten in Part 3 'Transformation and Dissemination after 1940'. The third edition of the book (1996) presented the most recent architectural developments in an entirely new fourth part 'Continuity and Change in the Late Twentieth Century', and completely reorganized the content of the previous three parts. It had thirty-five chapters: nine in Part 1, twelve in Part 2, eleven in Part 3, and three in Part 4. Some of the changes he introduced reflected cultural changes of the time: for example, he changed England and America in the first edition, to Britain and the U.S.A in the third edition; and Third World countries, to the developing world. In the case of his account of Australia, the word indigenous used in the first edition was changed to Aboriginal in the third.

Curtis acknowledged having done more to discuss the cultural role of architecture and to deal with interactions between building and the wider environment, meaning the urban environment. The chapter on 'Industrialisation and the City: The Skyscraper as Type and Symbol,' inserted near the beginning of Part 1 (figure 6), deals with the late nineteenth century industrial city and the architectural and philosophical dilemmas posed by the skyscraper. «While this is largely an American story (even a Chicago story), it also serves to outline some of the basic structures and generic contradictions of the capitalist city» which have to do with mobility and infrastructures, and with new building typologies like libraries and train stations, and which Curtis also finds in London and Par-

is (1996: 692). Chapter 8 on 'National Myths and Classical Transformations,' is added to «also explain some of the formative influences on the 'modern masters,' and hint at the later continuation of regional and classical influences within modern architecture itself» (1996: 692). In revising Part 1, Curtis gave more attention to the inheritance of theories from the nineteenth century (e.g. the writings of Gottfried Semper), and to diverse conceptions of nature. Even if he did not expressly admit that these additions were an attempt to rectify a lack of theoretical grounding in his work, they are precisely what some reviewers felt was missing in the first edition of *Modern Architecture Since 1900*. Not surprisingly, Curtis emphasised the reviewers' praise rather than their critiques when he talks about the revision process.

Apart from incorporating a chapter on 'International, National, Regional: The Diversity of a New Tradition', the second half of Part 2 (figure 7) was also reordered and reorganised. Curtis's intention was «to emphasise the range and diversity of modern architectural developments between the wars, to underline the various cultural, political and aesthetic agendas of seminal figures like Wright, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and Aalto, and to re-evaluate individual architects who never fit period pigeonholes, such as Schindler, Terragni and Mendelsohn» (1996: 692). It seemed to make more sense to discuss 'The Continuity of Older Traditions,' featuring works of architecture built by lesser-known architects between 1910 and 1930, in places as diverse as Prague, Stuttgart, London, Nebraska, New Delhi, Melbourne, Canberra, or Stockholm, after Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye. The chapter addressed the themes of «extension, 'naturalisation' and cultural adaptation, in short, the entire process of global dissemination» and the foundation of branches of the modern movement in countries such as Spain, Denmark, Sweden, Japan, Brazil, South Africa, Palestine and Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s (1996: 692). Curtis changed the title and content of the chapter 'Wright and Le Corbusier in the 1930s,' to 'Nature and the Machine: Mies van der Rohe, Wright and Le Corbusier in the 1930s,' acknowledging the critical response in regards to the little attention to the work of Mies. Finally, he also decided to place 'The Spread of Modern Architecture to England and Scandinavia' before his account of 'Totalitarian Critiques in the 1930s.' Regarding the revision of Part 2, Curtis wrote: «It was always an intention of the book to deal

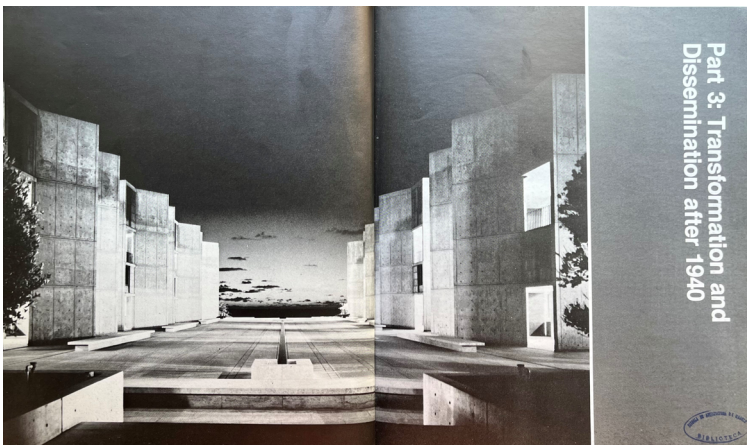
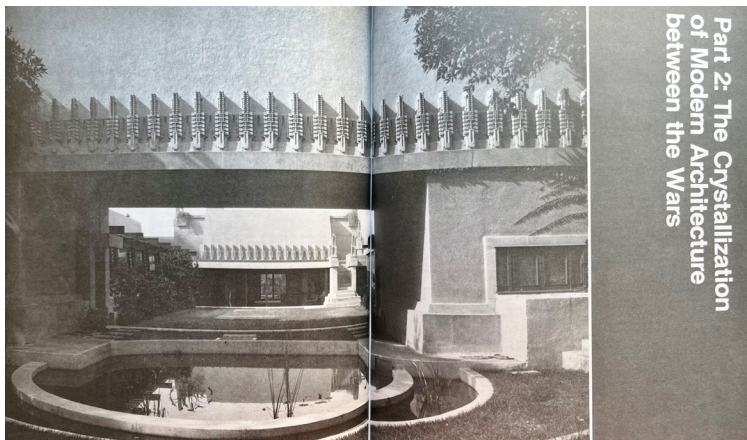


Figure 6. Cover of Part 1 of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (1982, 1987).

Figure 7. Cover of Part 2 of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (1982, 1987).

Figure 8. Cover of Part 3 of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (1982, 1987).

with the question of style in a deep sense, rather than abandoning the problem of style altogether as others have done. The first edition already expressed scepticism about the relative superficiality of the categories used in the formulation of a so-called 'International Style.' The third edition has gone further to clarify the underlying spatial concepts, mental structures and modes of organisation at work in the architectures of the 1920s. It delves into similarities and differences, generic types and particular variations, elements of personal and period style» (1996: 692).

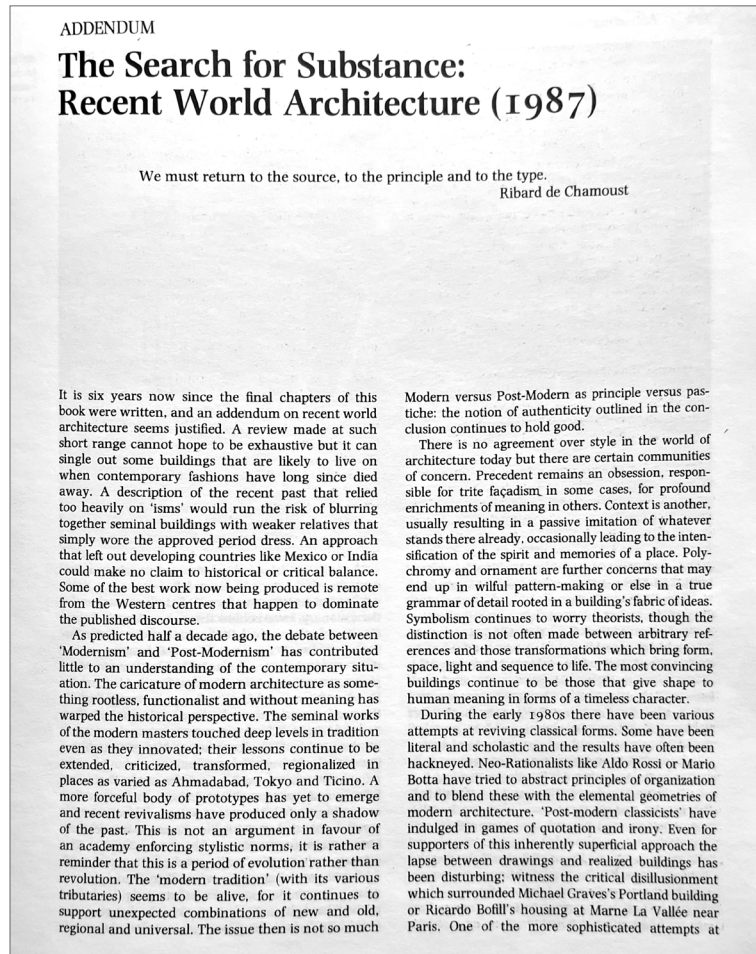
When the book was first written, in the late 1970s, the literature on the architecture of the years after the Second World War was «sparse and somewhat distorted by an apparent obsession with (mostly illusory) 'movements'» (Curtis 1996: 692). In the intervening years between the three editions of the book, Curtis came across more accurate and valuable studies of individual architects and building types. Two chapters are introduced in Part 3 (figure 8) between Curtis's account of the work of 'Alvar Aalto and the Scandinavian Tradition' ('tradition' was changed for 'developments' in the third edition) and the chapter on Louis Kahn and Monumentality. Firstly, 'Disjunctions and Continuities in the Europe of the 1950s,' on the European situation in the years of reconstruction which he hoped would compensate «for the thin treatment of Italy, Germany, Spain and Scandinavia in the earlier editions,» and, secondly, 'The Process of Absorption,' which portrays the significant contribution of countries in Latin America and Asia (1996: 692). Some reviewers of the first edition suggested that *Modern Architecture Since 1900* was one of the few general studies to broach the problems of modernisation, urbanisation, and identity in the developing world; the third edition expands upon these themes, notably for India, North Africa, and the Middle East (1996: 692). This expansion is intimately related to Curtis's own first-hand experience through extensive travelling.<sup>10</sup> Since he submitted the manuscript of the first edition, some of Curtis's trips included India, Thailand, and Indonesia in late 1982 – Cambodia was still inaccessible. He visited the south of India again the following year, as well as Sri Lanka (2017).

«Remember that by then [his participation in the Regional Seminar sponsored by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, held at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology in 1985], I had been in and out of India a great deal, also Mexico. I was very involved in those days with the ancient architecture of India, Southeast Asia, and Mexico, and with ways in which lessons from these were being transformed into modern forms» (2017).

In the addendum 'The Search for Substance: Recent World Architecture (1987),' (figure 9) Curtis summarised the mid-1980s as a time of evolution not revolution. He provided an update on the postmodern works introduced in the first edition. For example, in the first edition of the book, because the construction process was not finished, he

only discussed the project and the model of Stirling's Neue Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, whereas in the second edition he confirmed his opinion of the building as «more jocular than profound» (1987: 390). For him, some of the best works of the six years between the first and second editions were built in developing countries, in Turkey, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and designed by both local and international architects. In the case of Mexico, he highlighted the «lineage of modern architects who have attempted to combine the regional and the international and who have also been concerned with drawing lessons from the numerous layers of the architectural heritage» – a lineage of which architect Teodoro Gonzalez de León forms an important part (1987: 396). In India, apart from the work of Balkrishna Doshi, he had the opportunity to experience Charles Correa's work, also in Ahmadabad, and Raj Rewal's work in and around New Delhi (1987: 398-399). The same blend of tradition and modernity was identified in the work of the Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa, who brings together handicraft and architectural traditions while trying to build «in harmony» with the tropical climate and vegetation (1987: 399).

For the third edition, the addendum is transformed into an entirely new fourth part, which dealt with the complex development of world architecture since 1980, singling out buildings, tendencies and ideas that added to an architectural culture of lasting value (1996: 16). Part 4 was a proposed outline of «a preliminary historical map of the late twentieth century» (1996: 617). It explored Curtis's assertion in the preface to the second edition that lessons learned in the early twentieth century were being extended and transformed to better address the issues of context, region and tradition in many parts of the world. The three entirely new chapters examined a broad range of recent works in countries such as Spain, Switzerland, Finland, France, Japan, India, Australia, the United States and Mexico. Curtis organised the chapters around such general themes as the re-evaluation of the past, the response to local climates and cultures, the celebration of technology, and the re-emergence of abstraction. Curtis wrote in the introduction: «It seems that there are several 'cultures of modernity' in the recent past, and that these blend together long-term patterns and agendas with contemporary problems and preoccupations. Increasingly, architectural ideas are crossing frontiers, and this part of the



book is concerned with the intermingling of new and old, local, and universal» (1996: 17).

The buildings he chose to illustrate the last part of the book were designed by Juan Navarro Baldeweg, Norman Foster, Balkrishna Doshi, Juha Leviskää and Tadao Ando, who drew meaning from their respective places and societies, while contributing to a global architectural culture of substance. In addition, Curtis argued that it is between those two realities, regional and global, that these architects succeeded in achieving a certain balance and «remind us that modernism in the late twentieth century possesses a complex identity; continuing to aspire to a certain universality, even as it reacts to different territories and traditions; (...) inspiring new visions for the future, even as it transforms the past» (Curtis 1996: 17).

There are also interesting additions to and revisions of the conclusion chapter in the third edition of *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, as Curtis reflected on the possibilities that were still open at the end of the twentieth century. And, in fact, he could be referring to both architects and historians, who

Figure 9. First page of the addendum of the second edition of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (1987).



Figure 10. Example of a new chapter included in the third edition of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (1996).

can revise and reinterpret core ideas in their practice. Curtis included 'universalism' in his process of revision and expansion of his own work in the third edition: the universalising ambition of the Enlightenment was still evident in the transformative character that he observed in the process of modernisation of architecture. Regarding universalism in the Third World, Curtis wrote that «its 'universalism' was co-opted by nationalisms and imperialisms although it also served as a refracting prism through which local traditions (some of them with a universality of their own) could be re-examined in the post-colonial world» (1996: 685). This emphasis of universalism and specially anchoring it to the Enlightenment is seen today as more colonial than properly postcolonial, but it is worth noting that the time of the rewriting of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* coincides with the initial debates around translating postcolonial theory to architectural discourse. Curtis did not deny the regional component of recent architectural developments, but he warned of the distortions that could be caused by political and I would add ideological imperatives of internationalisation, on the one hand; and of regionalism, on the other. For this reason, he urged historians to treat these issues with caution.

In revising and rewriting the content towards the third edition of *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, Curtis gave more importance to

the following themes: architecture and the city; interactions between personal and period style; the transformation of the past in Western and non-Western contexts; the interplay between individual inventions and technological or vernacular norms; the tension between 'local' and 'universal' within modern architecture; the concept of a modern tradition; the effects of modernisation; and the underlying structure of world architectures of the recent past. Despite the thorough revision of the book, what Curtis calls the underlying intentions of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* and its basic framework, remain unchanged. The book had done «its best to negotiate these difficulties, and to portray the diverse strands of modernism in all their subtlety and complexity, in space and in time» (1996: 686). At least the third edition of the book had (figure 10).

### Writing and Revising Modern Architecture in the Late Twentieth Century

The unusual and unprecedented revision of the content of *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, and hence the differences between the first and third editions, allows us to also identify the positions and critical stances which Curtis maintains. This essay reflects on the implications of the rewriting process of *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, which in its first edition is one of the first results of what Mark Jarzombek has called the professionalization of the history of modern architecture since

1970. In January 2007, at the presentation of the Spanish translation of the third edition of *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, Curtis reminisced in detail about the revision: «The writing of history involves both reason and imagination and all propositions have to be submitted to sceptical analysis. Theories play some role but a good book, like a good building, is never just the demonstration of an a priori position. There is a special chemistry which occurs in the process of writing itself. And even when some points are proved wrong a work of depth continues to carry its messages for a long time to come» (2007).

The writing of history begins with a critical understanding of previous historiography on the subject, in this case, on modern architecture. Even if historians have aimed or claimed to present an 'objective' narrative of the events, it is complicated for them to overcome the identification with their subject, with their own discourse. Curtis aimed for balance, to bring the best out of the almost unprecedented opportunity he believed he had to write the history of modern architecture with dispassionate distance. In addition to dissenting from the *myths* created by early historiography, Curtis challenged contemporary historiography published around 1980, accusing Tafuri, Dal Co and Frampton of indulging in propaganda, beliefs and ideologies when writing their histories. To differentiate his own approach, Curtis played the role of the new historian, who should «avoid the temptations of either positive or negative propaganda» (1981: 170). Notwithstanding that it is nearly inevitable to fall into some of the previous historians' weaknesses the closer you get to the present, for Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900* was evidence of his attempt to avoid those weaknesses: «This book was written partly with the idea that a historical bridge might be built across the stream of passing intellectual fashions to a more solid philosophical ground, partly with the hope that this might encourage a return to basic principles. But such aims have been secondary: the first thing a historian ought to do is to explain what happened and why, whatever people may now think of it» (1996: 17).

It would be inaccurate to say that the first edition of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* is a reaction against the work of Tafuri, Dal Co, and Frampton. Although Stanislaus von Moos and Samuel B. Frank began their reviews of the book by mentioning Curtis's own 1981 *JSAH* review of their histories, by that time Curtis had already sent the full man-

uscript of his work to both the publishers and James Ackerman for their consideration. However, I posit that some of the comments in the preface to the first edition also read as critiques of these historians, whose work Curtis presents as being in opposition to what he understood to be the task of the historian and the role of history.

The preface to the second edition, together with the addendum, already presented Curtis's objection to mapping the late twentieth century in terms of '-isms.' In preparing the third edition of the book, Curtis was also driven by his rejection of contemporary 'fashions' or trends. During the course of our communication, he admitted that the «transition from first to second and above all third editions of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* was in part propelled by a refusal to accept the dominant fashions whether postmodernism, deconstructivism, etc.,» which are the basis of the last three chapters of the third edition (June 6 2017). He did not criticise Frampton directly, but that is precisely the way recent architecture is presented in Frampton's *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (1980): classified by '-isms' which change between the 1980, 1985 and 1992 editions. Furthermore, Curtis's rejection of these categories is further developed in Part 4 of the third edition of his book. Since one of Curtis's reasons for expanding the book was to present a more complete account of the architecture of the 1970s and 1980s, it can be argued that the revision of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* was in part motivated by this intention to give an alternative to a classification by '-isms' – to Frampton's classification, to differentiate his discourse. If Curtis was revising, writing, and rewriting from late 1993, it is safe to say that, at that time, he had access to the 1992 edition of Frampton's critical history. Even though most of the time Curtis does not mention Frampton or his book specifically, he rejects precisely what is present in *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*. Writing in 1995, he claimed that the time had «come now for some major additions and revisions,» of the architecture produced in the intervening years between editions. Curtis admitted that writing the third edition was hard, as it involved reconsidering many of his assumptions as a historian (2007).

Revision means, according to Adrienne Rich, «the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction» (1979: 35). In writing and revising *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, Curtis looked back at architects, buildings, and

interpretations, with a new perspective and fresh eyes, exactly what he argued the architect and the historian of the present should do. As a result of the practice of re-editing and re-publishing books, notions like value and originality operate differently for written works than for, say, visual art works. In the case of books in general, and of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* specifically, first editions tend to be scarce and rare, and, hence, more expensive; the third edition could be considered less valuable given its availability and affordability. However, this is not the only way to look at it, and the difference in the content in the three editions of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* needs to be considered when undertaking a historiographical analysis.

On the one hand, the third edition is the most complete and up to date for students to deepen their understanding of the different strands of modern architecture. However, on the other hand, there are some nuances and bold judgments made in the first edition that are worth noting and knowing, which are suppressed in the third edition. Whether additions or suppressions, those changes make it necessary to acknowledge both versions almost as independent works. Curtis went one step further and declared that the book «does not pretend to be 'definitive': works of history are working hypotheses which require testing and adjustment in the light of new facts» (2015a). Curtis reflected on the idea of writing a fourth edition, for which «I shall again do my best to integrate my own and other people's findings into the overall synthesis» (2015a).

Before concluding, it is worth going back to the conclusion of the 1996 edition and Curtis's reflections on the way he included recent architectural developments in the revision of the book's content, with an emphasis on re-examination. As with the re-examination of local traditions in a postcolonial world, modern architecture in Curtis's narrative entered a new phase in the 1980s, where several of its generative principles were re-examined and re-activated, and where identities and territories were redefined (1996: 686). He admitted that, as a historian, it was hard to write a conclusion about a process that was still unfolding, and of which he considered himself to be part. Curtis summed up his intention with *Modern Architecture Since 1900* as explaining that there is nothing simple or predestined about the modernisation of architecture and presenting its continuities and disjunctions. His intention was rather a pedagogical one. It

is worth noting the change in Curtis's vocabulary for the conclusion of the third edition of *Modern Architecture Since 1900*. He used verbs such as revise, re-examine, reactivate, rethink, reread, and reinterpret; verbs which appear often in the disciplinary reassessment of both art and architectural history at the end of the twentieth century, including historiographical studies. Indeed, a certain parallelism can be drawn between the way architects reinterpreted modern architecture and the way historians reread canonical history. Furthermore, the writing of this essay revisiting the book can be seen as yet another parallelism, in this case in the sphere of the study of the writing of the history of architecture, its historiography.

To conclude, the three editions of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* were the result of Curtis's reaction and response to the theoretical currents of the time when he was writing them, first of the late 1970s and then of the early 1990s.<sup>11</sup> Written at a postmodern time by a convinced modernist historian, the book is the result of the dialogue he established with his own work, claiming to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of his narrative. In the first edition of the book, Curtis presented a prospective attitude, anticipating positions that he later had the opportunity to look at from a retrospective point of view for the third edition. In addition, it is the result of the dialogue he established with the readers, both students and scholars, who still today need to acknowledge the differences between the editions and the historiographical implications of the unprecedented revision towards the third edition. This essay demonstrates that it is not possible to refer to *Modern Architecture Since 1900* without an explicit mention of the edition. Just as was anticipated by Jorge Sainz in his review of the book, the meticulous comparison between editions is a revealing and productive task (1996: 73).

#### Notes

- 1 The research undertaken for this essay was funded by an International Scholarship awarded by the Research Training Program of the Australian Government. This essay builds on online communication between the author and William J.R. Curtis which was conducted with the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Canberra.
- 2 For a more comprehensive account of the critical reception of the different editions of the book see Macarena de la Vega de León, *An in-*

- tertined history: the contribution of William J. R. Curtis to the historiography of modern architecture*, doctoral dissertation (University of Canberra, 2018). <https://doi.org/10.26191/qatq-gb45>
- 3 William J.R. Curtis (1986). *La arquitectura moderna desde 1900*. Madrid: Hermann Blume. Translated by Jorge Sainz Avia.
  - 4 (2006). *La arquitectura moderna desde 1900*. Madrid: Hermann Blume. Translated by Jorge Sainz Avia.
  - 5 (1990) *Kajima Shuppankai*. Translated by Tomoko Goto, Akira Sawamura and Kaoru Suehiro. (1989) *Architektur im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt. Translated by Antje Pehnt.
  - 6 (2002) *Moderne Architektur seit 1900*. Berlin: Phaidon Press Limited.
  - 7 (1999) *L'architettura moderna del Novecento*. Milano: Bruno Mondadori. Translated by Anna Barbara and Chiara Rodriguez.
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  - 9 (2008) *Arquitectura moderna desde 1900*. Porto: Alegre Bookman. Translated by Alexandre Salvaterra.
  - 10 For a more complete discussion of the importance of first-hand experience in Curtis's approach to history see Macarena de la Vega de León (2020). Mediating History/Distances with Modern Architecture Since 1900. In *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand 36, Distance Looks Back*, edited by Victoria Jackson Wyatt, Andrew Leach and Lee Stickells, 91-101. Sydney: SAHANZ. <https://doi.org/10.55939/a2597c13up>
  - 11 For an in-depth analysis of Curtis's theorisation of the notions of regionalism and post-modernism in relation to other positions in the 1980s and 1990s, and to more contemporary discourses, see Macarena de la Vega de León (2023). Theorizing a Modern Tradition. In *The Contested Territory of Architectural Theory*, edited by Elie G. Haddad, 113-124. Abingdon and New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003292999-9>
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