

latitudes V

UT Austin + FAUUSP

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There are some contexts in which institutions are so strong that tradition comes as a birthmark with some great initiatives; while in those where institutions are weak they start as marked to death, they have to last quite long and overcome so many obstacles to be considered reliable and to be taken as a tradition. US belong to the first group.

The Latitudes were conceived as a series of conferences by initiative of the Architecture School of University of Texas at Austin with an ambitious purpose: much more than a list of speakers, their goal was defined aiming to enhance cultural links between architects from different regions, mostly expressed through different latitudes, in the American continent. Indeed, the history of that remarkable public university founded in 1883 [Architecture School began in 1910] and its geographical location forged its role in a border line between 'two Americas' enable and legitimize that ambition. The fact that UT Austin has been able to see on that border line a source of cultural richness instead of a conflict, as orienting its focus in order to expand the line into multiples possibilities of connections instead to take that as a barrier, to assume that as a field for fruitful dialogues [a door] instead of a segregating wall has forged the precedents which allow the proposal of Latitudes Conference as an expected result. I mean, UT Austin Architecture School has been showing it is able to design, as a project, its own role in the cultural scenario. This capacity is not easy at all to be achieved, but it is a crucial requirement for any architecture school who intends to fulfill a relevant role in the field of culture at the current agenda.

The progression of Latitudes Conference demonstrates how clear it is its initial design: after the four first editions, which took place in Austin, Texas; a first one, the number fifth, would happen abroad inaugurating a new phase in that plan. Since then, alternately in Austin and other country or region.

Why FAUUSP to be the first Latitudes Conference outside UT Austin?

The answer for this question might differ according to the perspective of each institution and it is sure that the approach here is based on a FAUUSP perspective. Despite of that, it was made somehow familiar with UT Austin. Of course, what provide a breath of life to institutions are its people, who talk, teach, travel, who ultimately exchange and establish a human and reliable cooperation between schools. The first answer for that question will touch this dimension. Looking back and briefly listing some facts: [1] Barbara Hoidn came to FAUUSP around 2006, when we first met each other. [2] Next year, I would be invited to lecture at UT Austin. [3] In 2008, Kevin Alter, then the chair of the UT Austin Architecture School, traveled to Brasil in order to write an article on my work, which would be published in a O'Neil Ford Duograph publication untitled "Brazil: house in Santa Teresa and House at Rio Bonito" edited by Barbara and Kevin. [4] In 2009 I went back to Austin as a speaker for the first edition of Latitudes Conference; [5] then in 2010 as a visiting professor there the second Latitudes took place. [6] Finally in 2012 I went back to Austin as a respondent at the 4th Latitudes, besides it was the launch of the publication of my PhD thesis published by UT Austin having as editors one more time Barbara Hoidn and Kevin Alter.

It was there, during the 4th Latitudes, that we objectively started to plan about the upcoming conference in Sao Paulo. Besides Barbara, Kevin and Wilfried Wang, formally the idea was presented by Frederick Steiner,

dean at UT Austin Architecture School. At that same occasion I could also have advices from Coleman Cocker, Fernando Lara and Carlos Jimenez. Right after, once back to Sao Paulo the proposal was presented to FAUUSP, which was quite receptive about it. Marcelo Romero, as our dean, has promptly agreed and Maria Cristina Leme, as vice-chair, was really supportive in the whole process in order to allow our school to host the 5th edition of the Latitudes Conference in 2013. Actually, the event would not be possible without her enthusiasm and commitment. From FAUUSP side, Maria Cristina Leme and Juliana Braga, as a PhD student, and myself were in charge of the organization. From UT Austin side, Barbara Hoidn was in charge of all support and interlocution.

The event was co-sponsor by both institutions.

More than an institutional support, professors and students embraced the event joining enthusiastically to the idea. It meant an opportunity to bring together a group of renowned architects as sequence of lecture we rarely had at FAUUSP. The engagement of home professors and students can be attested in their formal participation during the event mediating, presenting or commenting: Alvaro Puntoni, Eduardo de Almeida, Luis Antonio Jorge, Antonio Carlos Barossi, Monica Junqueira e Marcos Acayaba. Besides, we had also participants of other Brazilian schools as Carlos Eduardo Comas, Renato Anelli. Valeria Fialho, chair of the SENAC Architecture School, had a remarkable personal and institutional participation.

Therefore, the choice of FAUUSP could be foreseen, I mean, it was according to a quite clear interest that UT Austin demonstrated in their trips, invitations, publication, at last in their actions aiming to strengthen exchanges and relationship to Brazil. Through the people representing both institutions FAUUSP seemed to make sense, from UT Austin side but also from Brazilian side as a positive unfold in our institution of different modes of academic exchange.

Then, from a FAUUSP perspective, why host the fifth Latitudes Conference in Sao Paulo?

First of all there is a reason of excellence, because UT Austin is an outstanding school of architecture in with it definitely worth to exchange expertizes and know-how. It has been rated among the best schools in US; in 2012, for instance, its undergraduate program was ranked as number two in the whole country, a real achievement for a public school. Its highlighted position, however, did not rise so recently, indeed it was noticed much earlier. There is a remarkable episode occurred in the first half of the fifties which can illustrate how its thoughts and ideas were spread out around the world influencing several schools around the world. It was when the architect Harwell Hamilton Harris, as the dean of the school, has invited a group of young architects, they were Bernhard Hoesli, Colin Rowe, John Hejduk among others. Bernard Hoesli would be who [from 1959 to 1984] has defined how to teach design studios at ETH Zurich program. Colin Rowe, would teach theory at Cornell University [from 1962 to 1990], his books, such as Collage City or The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa, would influence schools and architects around the whole world. John Hejduk would be dedicated to Cooper Union [from 1964 to 2000, as a dean in the last 25 years] and became for sure one of the most influential character through his projects and books and mostly through his work as a remarkable educator imprinting his ideas on successive generations of the most talented architect in US. The work of the three of them after UT Austin was promulgating their shared experience in Texas, their further crucial role in different schools are also credited to their time together in Austin, so much that the group was later coined as the Texas Rangers.

A second good reason is to express FAUUSP alignment to the orientation imprinted to the Latitudes Conferences. On this account to support the idea that architecture activity, I mean the work of the architects currently work designing buildings who are the guests lecturing at the conferences and who provide the raw material as source for debating, understanding the nowadays paradigms and elaborating links and relationship among multiples contexts in America, mostly do support the concept that architecture belongs to the field of culture instead economics, which means that we must overcome boundaries which isolate countries

and regions by economic criteria to weave new cultural mesh enhancing our possibilities, vocabulary and repertoire; or to boost our possibility to prevent the disaster.

Besides, to host the 5th Latitudes at FAU is according to the policy of the USP in his effort for internationalizing the institution. It is a meaningful goal particularly for this architecture school, whose activity was so heavily damaged by two decades under a dictatorship [1964-1985] and henceforth had to deal with that tragic legacy; first immerse under a cultural wreckage scenario facing a must do tasks as to recover a minimum platform for its activity and to resume international links and exchanges. As a result that post-dictatorship generation had to be dedicated to find a broader field for debate and to update theory and practice, what can be attested by their clear engagement on academic issues as teaching, researching and building a consistent worldwide exchange programs, among them with a remarkable interest — because so systematically neglected until very recently — South America. So, finally it is time, for FAUUSP in particular and by similar reasons, for Brazilian architecture in general to face this expected and challenging issue: to overcome the limits of being secluded and to test in a broader, or international, context the validity of its concepts and paradigms. Latitudes Conference doesn't mean exactly the proper stage for this dialogue, just because from a FAUUSP perspective it is more to host than act, more listening than talking, but it means for sure a crucial opportunity to enlarge our understanding, to learn how to consider different reasons and conditions which prevails in other contexts. I mean to learn that different approaches and paradigms can also have a similar validity. In other words considering architecture as belonging to the field of culture, multiplicity and variety are positives because each component of this multiplicity works as a repository of each other possibilities in the process of elaborating new architectural propositions. I mean, for architecture the cultural diversity is something to be preserved and enhanced because it enriches our possibilities of exchange, enlarge our field of dialogue and above all keeps alive and always changing the practice of architecture.

The most important reason to have this 5th Latitudes Conference at FAUUSP, it corresponds to the breath of life of a school, as people talking in studios, classrooms or at ramps. It means to worth the living portion of a faculty instead of a frozen structure. It is to consider that the treasure of a school is their people living together. UT Austin and USP together shows an obvious, and so often forgotten, point: all universities co-existing around the world are pieces which compose one single institution. To consider them at this worldwide scale save each one of them of its own idiosyncrasies.

The fact that each one of our guest lecturer has promptly accepted our invitation emphasize the idea that we are all part of the same activity. Thanks a lot to Smiljan Radic; Jean Pierre Crousse and Sandra Barclay; Camilo Restrepo; Luis Aldrete; Carlos Jimenez; Kevin Alter; Alexandre Brasil, Paula Zasnicoff Cardoso, Carlos Alberto Maciel and Bruno Santa Cecília; Billie Tsien and Tod Williams.