Revisiting Quotations
Regionalism in Historiography

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Abstract
A quotation is a statement taken from a text or speech and reused by someone other than the original author. What happens when that "someone" is a historian? What use have architectural historians, specifically, made of quotations in writing the history of twentieth century architecture? It is interesting to discuss the ways in which a quotation sets the tone for what precedes and follows in a text. Reviewing Kenneth Frampton’s Modern Architecture: A Critical History (1980) and William J.R. Curtis’ Modern Architecture Since 1900 (1982), it is noteworthy that all their chapters start with a quotation, an unprecedented and isolated example of such usage in the field. This paper investigates the differences and similarities between the quotations used by these two authors in chapters discussing the theories of regionalism, because they contributed significantly to framing the debate on this notion in the early 1980s. Critical regionalism and authentic regionalism, as discussed by Frampton and Curtis respectively, are categories that result from their different takes on the subject. Revisiting the notion of regionalism, this paper will present a comparative analysis of both the use of quotations, and the quotations used in these two-seminal works. This paper argues that between the lines of the quotations used by these authors to develop different approaches to regionalism lies the paradox of the permanence and disappearance of invariable architectural elements and principles in the search for modernity. Furthermore, it will investigate the ways in which Frampton’s and Curtis’ interpretations of regionalism resonate with their particular approaches to architectural history.
Modern Architecture(s) and Regionalism(s) in the 1980s

The reuse of significant quotations is among the foundations of the writing of history. Usually quotations appear throughout papers and chapters, to accompany, support or contradict the author’s argument. There are only two examples in the historiography of modern architecture of works that use quotations to open and set the tone for each chapter: Kenneth Frampton’s Modern Architecture: A Critical History (1980) and William J.R. Curtis’ Modern Architecture Since 1900 (1982), both published in the early 1980s. This use of quotations is unprecedented, and nor has it been taken up in the work of later historians. Neither Alan Colquhoun in Modern Architecture (2002), nor Jean-Louis Cohen in The Future of Architecture Since 1889: A Worldwide History (2012) has followed their example.

Each chapter in Frampton’s and Curtis’ books begin with a quotation, and there are similarities and differences in the ways they use them. In Frampton’s Critical History quotations are significantly longer, and are presented as part of the main body of the text, but in a lighter font. In Curtis’ Modern Architecture, by contrast, the larger page format allows for the quotations to be held separate from the main body of the text. This reflects these two authors’ different understanding of the use of quotations: Frampton begins most of the chapters by discussing the chosen quotation as part of his argument, while Curtis does not. Both authors use quotes from the leading actors of their narrative such as Le Corbusier, Adolf Loos and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti; from historians such as Sigfried Giedion and Henry-Russell Hitchcock; and from theorists of the post-war period such as George Alexander Kubler, Aldo van Eyck and Paul Ricoeur.

The decade of the 1980s was key to the framing of the notion of “Regionalism” because of a series of events and publications, some of which will be commented below and which will now be summarised chronologically. The term critical regionalism was first introduced by Tzonis and Lefaivre in the essay “The Grid and the Pathway” published in Architecture in Greece in 1981. In 1982 Curtis published Modern Architecture Since 1900 including a chapter on “The Problem of Regional Identity”. In 1983 Peter Buchanan published “With Due Respect: Regionalism” in The Architectural Review. Also in 1983, Frampton published his essays on critical regionalism: “Prospects for a Critical Regionalism” and “Towards a Critical Regionalism,” and just two years after, in 1985, he added a chapter on ‘Critical Regionalism: Modern Architecture and Cultural Identity’ to the second edition of his book Modern Architecture: A Critical History. 1985 is also the year when the Regional Seminar sponsored by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture was held at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology with the participation of both Curtis and Frampton, among others. In 1986 Curtis published “Towards an Authentic Regionalism” and 1989 was the year in which Frampton participated in the first international Colloquium on Critical Regionalism at Pomona University where he already re-visited the notion.

In spite of these events and publications, theorists struggled to formulate a unified definition of regionalism in architecture, resulting in multiple interpretations. Some of them defined regionalism in terms of what it is not. For example, Paul Rudolph states as early as 1957 that “climate control” is not regionalism. In 1958, Harwell Hamilton Harris, whose distinction between a regionalism of restriction and one of liberation Frampton quotes in Modern Architecture: A Critical History, claims that “regionalism is ‘a state of mind.’” In the 1980s, some authors turned to “dividing” the notion into different classifications. Suha Özkan, in the introduction to the 1985 Aga Khan Award seminar’s proceedings, differentiates between two approaches to “vernacularism” –a conservative one and an interpretive one or “neo-vernacularism”– and what he calls “modern-regionalism”. In his paper for the same seminar, Habib Fida Ali made another classification: he argued that “when we talk of regionalism as a source of inspiration we must make the distinction between regionalism as an ideology opposed to universalism and regionalism as an objective analysis which focusses on specific demands on architecture.” This multiplicity of definitions has been criticised as causing the notion of regionalism to lose its meaning and becoming a “catchword” or “slogan”. Shortly after critical
regionalism was re-visited and had arguably re-emerged in the 1989 Pomona Colloquium; it was already the object of fierce criticism. Already in 1996, critical regionalism was defined by Jane M. Jacobs as “a revisionary form of imperialist nostalgia”.11

Both Frampton and Curtis participated in the debates that aimed to formulate the notion of regionalism. However, the ways they introduce the subject in their narratives of modern architecture, again, differ. While Modern Architecture: A Critical History was published before Modern Architecture Since 1900, it was not until its second edition, revised and enlarged (1985), that Frampton included a chapter on “critical regionalism”. Frampton opens his chapter on critical regionalism with the quotation that frames Paul Ricoeur’s formulation of the paradox between cultures and civilization. Frampton’s stated aim with this chapter was to “draw attention to the fact that a regionally inflected but critical and ‘revisionist’ form of modern architecture has been in existence for the past forty years or more,” although elsewhere he also referred to it as recent development. 12 In comparison, Curtis addresses ‘Regionalism’ from the first edition of his book (1982), mentioning the topic in several chapters. As an opening to the chapter on regional identity Curtis chose a quotation on the steel and concrete framed structure by Noboru Kawazoe. It is worth highlighting that the titles of both Frampton’s and Curtis’ chapters include the word “identity,” referring to both cultural and national identity.

Again, this paper discusses the quotations selected by Frampton and Curtis for their chapters on the theories of regionalism because these two authors alone decided to give quotations a significant role in their histories. The aim is to revisit the notion of regionalism as it was exploring in the 1980s by reflecting on the following: firstly, the ways Frampton’s and Curtis’ quotations frame their interpretation of critical and authentic regionalism, respectively; secondly, the way these quotations relate to the content of their discourse; and, finally, the ways the quotations relate to each other. Furthermore, it is relevant to investigate the ways in which these two historians’ interpretations of regionalism resemble their particular approaches to architectural history.

Quoting Authentic Regionalism

Curtis used this quotation from Noburu Kawazoe, from 1958, to begin his chapter on “The Problem of Regional Identity”: “Steel and reinforced concrete, in the form of columns and beams, provide framed structures and are, in this respect akin to traditional timber constructions”.13 Kawazoe’s quote exemplifies, in very few words, one of the main ideas of Curtis’ discourse on regionalism: that modernity and tradition are not opposed to one another. Kawazoe presented frame structures as the result of building logic and experience that has developed throughout history. Whether frame structures are modern or traditional (or neither), the point is that they are permanent, immutable. In other words, modern steel and concrete framed structures are not fundamentally different from the traditional timber construction system, as they both materialise the same basic architectural principle: the bearing of the load. However, what Curtis disregarded is the fact that modern techniques and materials result in new developments; for example, Le Corbusier’s domino-frame concrete structure resulted in characteristic features such as the open plan and the horizontal window.

In his chapter on regionalism, Curtis presented a chronology of different approaches to the subject in modern architecture. In his opinion, there are differences depending on when certain countries “received,” or imported, modern architecture, also depending on the attitude of the country towards modernity and tradition, and the relationship between the two, which at that time influenced the quality of the resultant architecture. For instance, Curtis observed pluralism and transformation in many parts of the world in the late 1940s and 1950s; however, according to him, there is a shift in attitude by the early sixties, when it becomes more usual to export straightforward forms to provincial centres. Curtis wrote, “it was as if the steel and concrete rectangular frame, the air-conditioner and the property developer conspired to reject national traditions overnight,” which led to what he calls the ‘international corporation style.’14 As Curtis explained, this style’s bland buildings and its rejection of local tradition produced a strong reaction that characterises the 1970s.
It is obvious from Curtis’ remarks that regionalism is intimately related to the attitude towards modernity and tradition held not only by architects, but also by the society at large. What he denominates “international corporate style” is the result of a straightforward exportation of the modern frame structure, among other features, without an understanding of—or even consideration of—the underlying principles. Curtis constantly mentioned these ‘principles’ and ‘kernel’ when discussing regionalism as part of a tradition that needs to be kept alive and rethought, but does not list them in depth or detail. The negative connotation Curtis gives to the frame structure in the “international corporate style” is the result of its misuse and misunderstanding. This claim of misuse contrasts with the defence of a traditional understanding of the frame structure found in Kawazoe’s quotation, used as chapter-opening.

Even if Curtis insisted on a balance between tradition and modernity, this is not easy to achieve. Brazil and Mexico in Latin America, and Japan and Australia in the Asia Pacific region are the countries where Curtis found tensions between the new and the old: there is “class” tension in Mexico and Brazil where architects cannot build without the support of the wealthy minority; tension in Japan where the relationship with the West and its architectural ideas and influence has been ambivalent; and tension between two different traditions in Australia—the white Australian culture and the culture of the “indigenous” population (the word is changed to ‘Aboriginal’ in the third edition of the book). Through the selected examples of frame structures in these countries, Curtis seemed to imply that finding the balance between modernity and tradition needs the architect’s engagement. He asks, “should one accept the avowed universality of modern design and bow down before it: or should one perhaps seek some fusion between the best of the old and new, of native and foreign?”

Curtis developed his discourse on regionalism in subsequent papers published in 1985 and 1986, in which he changes Kawazoe’s opening quotation for one that more clearly states his own view. He opens “Towards an Authentic Regionalism” by citing Marcello Piacentini, who had already argued in 1922 that modernity and tradition need not be antithetical:

> It involves, basically, resolving the debate between impersonal, international standardised architecture, and localised vernacular architecture. But then are the two tendencies really antithetical? ... It is possible to arrive at the vision of a sane architecture which will be neither old nor new but simply true...

Curtis admitted that he wrote this essay “in a hurry just before I left the farm in the Ardèche for Dhaka, Bangladesh in late 1985 and read it out there in a seminar organised by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture”. At the seminar, he included this same quotation at the beginning of his talk, and mentioned having written the paper “Towards an Authentic Regionalism” just three weeks before, and his intention “to refer to a few passages from it because they do, in a reasonably succinct way sum up my present reflections on the subjects”. The few passages of the text ended up being most of the talk, which was published in the Mimar volume the year after.

Curtis criticised the trend of thought that opposes modernity to tradition for misunderstanding both notions. He claims that “the best within modernism can be profoundly rooted in tradition; and the best in tradition is to do with a dynamic process of rethinking certain central kernel ideas”. Instead of placing modernity and tradition, the local, national and international, in opposition, he advocates finding a balance between them, incorporating the best of each; and understanding the ways they transform each other, reinvigorating tradition and ‘regionalising’ the modern and imported. The “new” quotation, rather “old” in age, advocates for a “true” architecture, which allows Curtis to introduce authenticity into his discourse on regionalism. In his opinion, “the authentic regionalist looks beneath the surface to the basics and these he attempts to transform”. Curtis locates the authentic regionalists in the Middle East, Africa and some parts of Asia, in architects and countries visited by...
him and neglected by previous historians. These “basics” are, for Curtis, architectural principles that refer to an architectural value system, rather than a political or ideological one. This is one of the main differences between his and Frampton's discourses on critical regionalism.

Quoting Critical Regionalism
Interestingly enough, Frampton’s chapter on “Critical Regionalism: Modern Architecture and Cultural Identity” begins with an opposition between rooted national cultures and universal civilization as discussed by Paul Ricœur. In a recent lecture, Frampton mentioned the significance of Ricœur’s essay “Universal Civilization and National Cultures” – and hence, quotation – in his own approach to the notion of “critical regionalism” introduced by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre in 1981. Ricœur’s essay, recommended to him by Dalibor Vesely, admittedly influenced Frampton in bridging recent architectural examples and theories. To open the chapter on “critical regionalism,” Frampton reused a very long quotation (459 words, excerpted here):

The phenomenon of universalization, while being an advancement of mankind, at the same time constitutes a sort of subtle destruction, not only of traditional cultures, which might not be an irreparable wrong, but also of what I shall call for the time being the creative nucleus of great civilizations and great culture, that nucleus on the basis of which we interpret life, what I shall call in advance the ethical and mythical nucleus of mankind. The conflict springs up from there. (...)Thus we come to the crucial problem confronting nations just rising from underdevelopment. In order to get on to the road toward modernization, is it necessary to jettison the cultural past which has been the raison d’être of a nation?... Whence the paradox: on the one hand, it has to root itself in the soil of its past, forge a national spirit, and unfurl this spiritual and cultural reivindication [sic] before the colonialist’s personality. But in order to take part in modern civilisation, it is necessary at the same time to take part in scientific, technical, and political rationality, something which very often requires the pure and simple abandon of a whole cultural past. (...)We are in a tunnel, at the twilight of dogmatism and the dawn of real dialogues.

Frampton referred to an “anti-centrist consensus” among the factors responsible for the emergence of Regionalism. This is clearly illustrated in the chosen examples: the idiosyncratic Catalan culture of Barcelona in the 1950s, Alvaro Siza’s work in Porto and Tadao Ando’s work in Osaka (rather than Tokyo). Frampton presented the work of these architects as a result of their peripheral character, as part of a “provincial culture,” which has the capacity to be critical and resist the “destruction” and “conflict” identified by Ricœur in the opening quotation. Frampton listed many more examples in Italy, Greece, the United States and Mexico, and use them to demonstrate the importance of place and local materials, tactile and topographic form. Other countries in Latin America are also mentioned, although only by name and the name of one or two architects. The fact that, apart from Mexico and Japan, the examples that Frampton discussed most thoroughly are located in Europe or the United States is evidence of the Western bias from which Curtis tries to distance himself. Curtis even connects this Western bias with the introduction of ideology into the narratives of modern architecture written by Frampton and other “historians who are happy to announce their Marxist affiliations; but then one recalls that Marx too had an extremely Europocentric view”.

While Curtis developed his discourse on regionalism in subsequent essays, Frampton’s chapter “Critical Regionalism: Modern Architecture and Cultural Identity” is the result of his previous research on the subject; the content of this chapter had already been published in 1983 in Perspecta as “Prospects for a Critical Regionalism”. And while Curtis introduced a new quotation in his later work on the topic, Frampton’s chapter reused Ricœur’s quotation, showing his continuing trust in it as an opening. The list of seven “features, or rather attitudes” of critical regionalism found at the end of the chapter is a summary of the content of Frampton’s “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance,” also published in 1983. These points are based on the paradox
formulated in Ricœur’s opening quotation and are presented in the form of binary oppositions of terms, a characteristic of post-colonialist discourse. According to Frampton, all of these features and attitudes need to be understood in the light of the fall of the Avant-garde and the negative consequences of progress, which is characteristic of his Marxist approach to the history of modern architecture. It can be seen that Frampton’s discourse on regionalism developed rapidly from the descriptive and theoretical to a more systematic approach. “From ‘prospect for’ to ‘towards’ a critical regionalism; Frampton outlined six themes reflecting on both historical and contemporary issues”.26

Before the end of the 1980s, Frampton revisited critical regionalism.27 In 1989, Frampton and several other scholars – mainly from Europe and the United States, with four exceptions from Israel, Mexico, Japan and Australia – gathered for the first international Colloquium on Critical Regionalism at Pomona. Here Frampton delivered the only paper on critical regionalism that did not open with the quotation by Ricœur, but it was still reused in the body of the text. Keeping the tectonic character of architecture in mind, Frampton argued for opposing universal technology and for resisting “the space endlessness of the megalopolitan development”.28 Conscious that his points had been interpreted as categorical opposites, he defended them as “points of dialectic interaction” leading to an architecture of resistance. In Frampton’s opinion, “such a resistant architecture presupposes the recognition of a particular form of culture politic, or, at the very least, the dependence of cultural and political practice on a set of underlying ethical and spiritual values”.29

This brief overview shows that there are some similarities (more than these authors—or at least Curtis—would like to admit) and differences in their discourses on regionalism. Both authors understand regionalism in architecture as the result of an attitude that they first, “draft” for architects, and then judge or value in their buildings. For Curtis, it is an “architectural value system” and for Frampton, “ethical and spiritual values,” both described in a very vague way and applied by each of them when analysing certain recent developments in architecture. While Frampton saw this attitude as being in opposition and resistance to the effects of “internationalism,” globalization, and liberalism in a post-colonial world, Curtis urged authentic regionalists to acknowledge—and even, accept—“that conditions alter drastically and that the present world is one of increasing inter-change and inter-dependence.”30 While Frampton searched for opposition and resistance, Curtis aimed to find dialogue and balance, and these attitudes are reflected in the quotations they reuse. While Ricœur used the words conflict and destruction, Piacentini talked about resolving a debate. In summary, these narratives resemble not a different regionalism or a different modern architecture, but their authors’ general approach to the history of architecture around 1980.

Historicising Regionalism(s)
This paper has demonstrated the significance of the use of quotations as chapter-openings in Frampton’s and Curtis’ histories of modern architecture, as well as in their formulations of critical and authentic regionalism respectively. Lastly, this paper’s conclusion is grounded in one of these quotations: Paul Ricœur’s paradox. It is reused not only by Frampton, but also by Curtis when he referred to the dilemma of the ‘developing world’ in the chapter on ‘Modernity, Tradition and Identity in the Developing World’ added to the third edition of Modern Architecture Since 1900 (1996). Curtis only quotes: “This is the paradox: how to become modern and return to sources; how to revive an old, dormant civilization and take part in universal tradition”.31 Subsequent criticism suggests that Frampton’s frequent reference to Ricœur’s essay “Universal Civilization and National Cultures,” “made evident the postcolonial underpinnings” of his work around 1980.32 Curtis briefly used Ricœur’s quotation in his formulation of authentic regionalism; therefore, the same could be said, to a smaller degree, of Curtis’ discourse.

The general discourse of regionalism in architecture has been criticised for being imposed on developing countries in the post-colonial period. Already in 1985, Paul Rudolph was advocating for regionalism to fuse with the great architectural models of the twentieth century, and not to be
something “superimposed from outside”. Following on from Harwell Hamilton Harris’ definition of regionalism as ‘a state of mind’, a definition that was quoted by Frampton, Keith Eggerner argued that the literature on critical regionalism lacks precisely this attention to the state of mind. “By heeding the voices of those responsible for building a particular culture, architects among many others, rather than imposing formulas upon them, we might come to understand better the richness of internal, local discourses in their full range and complexity”. Even if both Frampton and Curtis advocated for regionalism as a way to avoid arbitrariness in architecture, their own judgements and analyses can be criticised as being arbitrary. Given the importance of ‘attitude’ in their formulations of regionalism, what is Frampton’s and Curtis’ own personal attitude when addressing the important issue of including other countries in the narrative of modern architecture?

Tzonis and Lefaivre contended that there are good reasons not to draw “checklists of physical design criteria of how to be a critical regionalist”. Despite this, Frampton gave a list of features or attitudes that should be seen as examples of critical regionalism in architecture, and Curtis describes, not in the book but in his subsequent papers, the attitudes he looks for before granting an architect the label of an authentic regionalist. The balance between modernity and tradition that Curtis proposes can be regarded as a vague attempt to go beyond the oppositions of Frampton’s and others’ post-colonial discourse of regionalism. Curtis acknowledged that tradition, like modernity, is complex, and that “most vernaculars are in fact hybrids of indigenous and imported types and these types also change and adapt”. Recent studies have looked at reinterpreting tradition in the same way Curtis attempted to; for example Janet Abu-Lughon proposed to transform tradition, a static concept, into ‘traditioning’, which she saw as more active and better suited to referencing traditional environments that were never isolated. The concept of traditioning, “implies that while traditions may draw on the past, they are ultimately created in the present for present needs. She [Abu-Lughon] also warned against the concept of ‘tradition’ being used to reinforce or maintain ‘traditional’ forms of dominance”.

It has been shown how the discussion on regionalism and universalism gave Curtis the perfect excuse to address a gap he detected in recent histories. In his opinion, Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co’s Modern Architecture said “little or nothing (...) about either industrial or rural vernaculars, and next to nothing about the crucial problems of the ‘developing countries,’” and in Frampton’s case “one gets not a glimmer of the dramatic changes occurring in the Middle East, Africa and South East Asia”. In the 1980s there was good reason to understand regionalism as a strategy to broaden the scope of the historiography of modern architecture, as “one way toward that richness in architecture” which had been lacking for some time.

As this paper has demonstrated, Frampton’s and Curtis’ discourses on regionalism, or regionalisms, were being theorised –one could argue even imposed– and introduced to the histories of modern architecture simultaneously. The lack of historical distance between these two historians writing about regionalism in the 1980s, and the architecture of the 1970s that was being written about is undeniable. This is even truer in Curtis’ case: in the third edition of Modern Architecture Since 1900 (1996), he is already discussing the architecture of the 1980s and early 1990s in a way that has been described as “brave,” and a combination of history and criticism. However, it is only now, in 2017, that Frampton admitted that, in Modern Architecture: A Critical History he “left out a big part of the world”. He says that “in the last revision [which he is preparing for publication this year] I do not want to present a Eurocentric world: architecture in China, India or Africa is also part of the planet”. Will he link the notion of critical regionalism with examples from these countries? It could be inferred from Frampton’s words that one of the issues raised in this paper, whether regionalism should be ‘illustrated’ with examples from or outside Europe and the United States, will be further clarified in this new edition of his history. However, Frampton may drop the notion of regionalism, which he recently referred to as “embarrassing term” and focus on writing a global history of architecture.
The theories on regionalism, or the "many reiterations of the theory," are regarded today as multifaceted: "it does not stand as a singular theory or practice to be dominant".44 In conclusion, while revisiting the notion of regionalism, this paper has attempted to briefly historicise two approaches, the critical more 'dominant' than the authentic, among the multiplicity of ways of understanding the notion of regionalism in the 1980s. Accordingly, and as in any historicising process, the argument presented fundamentally depends on the authors and quotations chosen for discussion, and on the authors and quotations chosen to build the conclusion. Moreover, this paper has shown how the same quotation can be used to build different arguments and to set different tones for the piece of writing it accompanies. This paper concludes by arguing that by understanding regionalism as an object worthy of historical analysis, the idea has lost its critical capacity today—an argument that applies to both critical and authentic regionalism. The same could be said of modernism and modernity. As Hilde Heynen has very recently observed, "we should question whether we can get along in architectural history and theory with the categories we have used thus far".45 Whatever categories the discipline of architectural history may use today or in the future, quotations are, and will continue to be the majority of the "evidence" or "data" that architectural historians handle, analyse and interpret. Whoever sets out to write the history of regionalism will surely reuse Frampton's and Curtis' quotations.
Endnotes

17. Email communication with William J.R. Curtis on 22 February 2017. The inclusion of this communication has been approved by the Human Ethics Research Committee at the University of Canberra.
31 Curtis, Modern Architecture Since 1900 (1996), 578.
43 Frampton, “A conversation with Kenneth Frampton: Can there be a Global Architectural History today?”