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Turning hegemonic charts of urbanization: South America and the Pacific through *Amereida's* geo-poetic mapping

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Abstract | Today, the 'Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America' (IIRSA), a ground-breaking transnational urbanisation project for developing and integrating the South American hinterland, is operating. However, its execution engenders strong opposition due to its potential for territorial overexploitation and borderline nature and culture deterioration. According to critical Latin-American intellectuals, this project resumes the longstanding hegemonic discourses for archiving regional modernity and development through technocratic urbanisation projects. Facing this critical scenario that calls for new epistemological and ontological bases to understand, imagine and act on non-metropolitan territories beyond hegemonic design practices, this contribution unfolds the geo-poetic approach created in the 1960s' by the School of Architecture and Design of the PUC-Valparaíso as a critical means to revisit the modern hegemony of urbanisation reproduced over South America and the Pacific. Therefore, this article examines the links between the *Amereida's* trip (1965) and poem (1967), and the manuscript *For a Latin American point of view of the Pacific Ocean* (1970) developed by the Valparaíso School, tracing their geo-political and geo-historical analyses, together with geo-poetic narratives and representations. These documents serve to question the longstanding hegemonic design embedded in the invention and reinvention of America and the Pacific, through which the region became the backwardness and periphery of the modern planetary order. Lastly, this contribution proposes this geo-poetic proposal developed in the late 1960s, as a perspective for looking towards the South American hinterland and questioning the hegemonic discourses and actions promoted by the ongoing IIRSA urbanisation project.

Keywords: Amereida, geo-poetics, geo-politics, modern design, representation, urbanisation

Between September 27th to October 2nd of 1970, the Chilean Centre of Pacific Studies (CEPAC) organised the 'First Conference of the Pacific' in Viña del Mar. The meeting congregated different institutions and personalities of the international political-economic affair from the Americas and Asia, intending to discuss and outline new strategies for developing the countries towards the Pacific front. The seminar dealt with subjects such as the *Geostrategic History of the Pacific*, *Underdevelopment and Dependence in Latin America: A Problematic Relationship*, *The Latin American System and the Opening to the Pacific* and *The New Power Structure in the Pacific*. Among them, there was a lecture entitled *For a Latin American point of view of the Pacific Ocean*, given by Godofredo Iommi, who was a poet and professor at the School of Architecture and Design of the Catholic University of Valparaíso, later published in the *Revista de Estudios del Pacífico*, issue nº2, in 1971.

The first lines of this last manuscript described this School radical purpose: to elucidate a poetic fundament to face and think about the Pacific from a Latin American point of view and acquire further clarification about its destiny (Escuela de Arquitectura UCV 1970, 1). In order to do so, the manuscript develops two theses based on geo-historical references that were 'revisited in the light of poetry, without pretending to comment, objectify, or sentimentalise on it, which is generally how all the leaders of the past assume poetry' (Cruz et al. 1971, 9). Through this focus, this lecture was far from the geostrategic and geopolitical plans presented during the sessions. Instead, it was delivered as a 'scientific-poetic groundwork' (Cruz et al. 1971, 9), willing to revisit the historical processes through which the Latin American region and the South Pacific became a peripheral and dependent part of the modern planetary order. Furthermore, Iommi declares that eventually this proposal, elaborated by the Valparaíso School through the *Thesis of the Interior Sea* and the *Own North*, could be a worthwhile contribution for 'thinking about urbanism that is no longer based merely on the productivity of a region, a country, or a continent' (Cruz et al. 1971, 9).

The lecture given in the frame of the Conference of the Pacific became significant for the geo-poetic Latin/South American project, initiated five years before by the Valparaíso School with the *Travesía* and the poem *Amereida*. The text is an essential part of the book *Fundamentos de la Escuela de Arquitectura*, published in 1971 (figure 1), and it represents one of the rare academic writings made by the Valparaíso School regarding its Latin/South American geo-poetic approach for architecture and design studies.

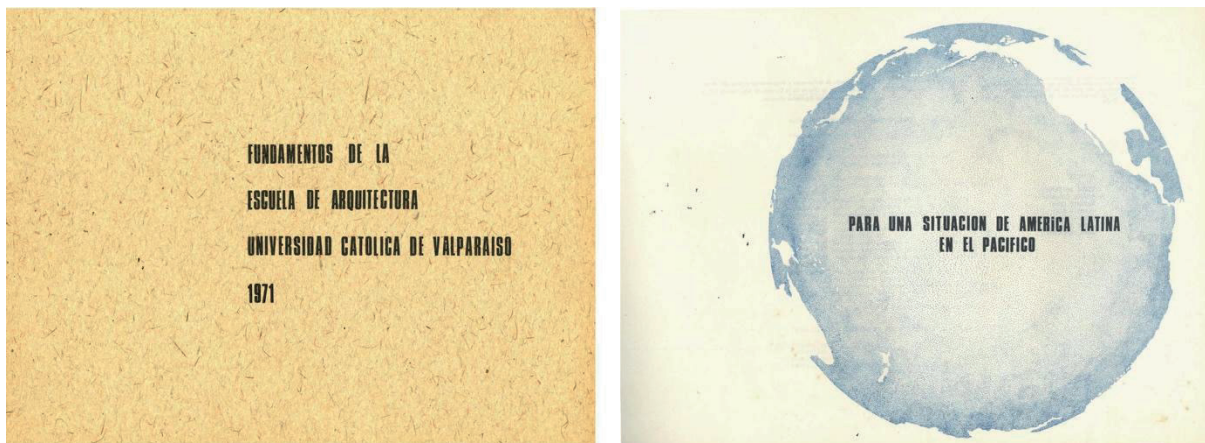


Figure 1 (left). Cover of the book *Fundamentos de la Escuela de Arquitectura*, Universidad Católica de Valparaíso. Figure 1 (right). Cover of the chapter 'For a Situation of Latin America in the Pacific'. (Source: Escuela de Arquitectura UCV, 1971).

Against this background, this article decodes the links between geo-historic, geo-politic and geo-poetic aspects developed in the manuscript *For a Latin American point of view of the Pacific Ocean* (1970) and its expanded version *For a Latin American situation in the Pacific* (1971), presented at the *First Conference of the*

Pacific in 1970. Through the analysis of these historical documents, forthcoming essays and classes around this manuscript, this article traces how the narrative and large-scale maps composed for this conference contributed to shaping an original critical epistemological approach, that served to question the longstanding hegemonic design embedded in the invention and reinvention of America and Latin America in the modern planetary order. In this line, the article outlines the tropes and maps used to elaborate the *Thesis of the Interior Sea* and the *Thesis of the Own North*, through which the Valparaíso School delivers a geo-poetic option to challenge the modern and Eurocentric geohistorical representations of the Americas in colonial and post-colonial periods. Consequently, I present that the narrative and large-scale maps imprinted in this manuscript can be envisaged as a critical metageographical approach (Lewis and Wigen 1997) to question hegemonies embedded in modern historiography and cartography design.

Finally, this contribution outlines how the notion of the *Interior Sea* was related to the *Heartland Theory*, developed by the English geographer Halford Mackinder (1904), to illustrate the geopolitical relevance of global hinterlands in contemporary planetary power relations, revealing an original awareness and perspective about the Latin American urbanisation. In this line, the article analyses how, facing the current paradoxical integration/exploitation of the South American hinterland/heartland promoted by the IIRSA transnational urbanisation project, this geo-poetic vision can be considered as an original groundwork to question the hegemonies embedded in the dichotomic idea of development and modernisation of the Southern region, especially beyond metropolises.

2. Grounding Geo-Poetics on South America

'El interior de América es nuestro desconocido, nuestro caos, nuestro mar.'
(Escuela de Arquitectura UCV 1972)

In 1965, professors of the Valparaíso School, together with philosophers and artists from Latin America and Europe, organised a trip across the South American continent called *Travesía*, with the purpose of crossing and incarnating the historical and ontological burden of inhabiting beyond the South American metropolis. For this reason, this journey was performed across the continental hinterland, poetically named the *Mar Interior* (Interior Sea), far from the big cities located in the edges of the mainland, since for the group, they cover the true diversity of the region (Iommi 1983). The *Travesía* started in the extreme South of Chile, crossing the Argentinean Patagonia and pampa, and ending in the Bolivian region of Tarija due to revolutionary *guerrillas* in September of 1965 (Iommi et al. 1986). Considering poetry and craft in action as the means to unveil the long-standing modern burden in the land, the trip was performed as a sum of poetic acts that in occasions involved local communities, or sometimes only the natural environment, that generated the building of artistic and architectural artefacts donated to locals (figure 2). These different creative experiences became the means to share wisdom and lifestyles different to those known by the group, that was connected to the hegemonic conventions settled in the metropolises. Consequently, these situated experiences, together with intellectual discussions about philosophy, design, historiography, and poetry, contributed to generating an original geo-poetic vision to question the modern invention of America, delivered in *Amereida*, a poem drafted during the *trip*, and later published in 1967.



Figure 2. Group performing a Work Act next to a road in the Argentine Patagonia during the Travesía de Amereida in 1965. (Source: Archivo Histórico José Vial Armstrong, 1965).

2.1. Veiling and Unveiling America and the Pacific

The manuscript presented at the *Conference of the Pacific* draws on *Amereida* and O'Gorman's theory of the *Invention of America* (O'Gorman 2010) to question the early historical events that precede any inscription of this continent on modern charts. These events became the cause of the peripheral situation of these lands and people into the modern European cosmology: Columbus never came to America, he died convinced that from these discovered lands one could reach Spain by travelling overland (Iommi et al. 1967, 13; Escuela de Arquitectura UCV 1970, 10). For the Valparaíso School, this error embodied by Columbus was not only a crucial fallacy in modern historiography, but the evidence that the beliefs of the conquistador together with his ambitions to reach the rich Indies was powerful enough to produce blindness and self-denial (Escuela de Arquitectura UCV 1970, 10). Indeed, even if Vespucci, when sailing southwards, noticed that he was circumnavigating a new continent, he rejected such possibility since it was simply unthinkable for Euro-Christian cosmology to discover in the *Orbis Alterius* fertile lands and human beings like those of the *Orbis Terrarum*.

The acceptance of this new continent within the European imaginary would not be effectively acquired until the arrival of Sebastian Elcano, at the head of the *La Victoria* Magallanes's ship, to Barrameda (Spain) and the subsequent imprint of this mainland in the modern chart *Nova et Aucta Orbis Terrae Descriptio ad Usum Navigantium Emendate Accommodata* (1569) produced by the Flemish cartographer Gerardus Mercator. While the discovery and the representations of America became corollary for global emancipation and modernity, these cartographic projections were fundamental tools not only to navigate planetary space, but to imagine its subordination to the pursuit of profit and power (Moore 2017, 182), leading to the domination and erasure of other cosmologies and human-nature relations (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2013). For instance, the hegemonic world order based on Mercator's geometric projection, distorting territories to represent Europe at a larger size, establishing the planetary centre at Greenwich, fragmenting the Pacific Ocean at both edges of the chart, and developing a hierarchical taxonomy of the world's regions in a Universal Atlas, are facts that are hardly discussed even by contemporary geographers.

Echoing *Amereida*'s narrative, the poet Manuel Sanfuentes of the Valparaíso School stresses that in the epic process of mapping the immense north-south vastness of America, these lands were accepted and incorporated into the European mentality. At

the same time, the indigenous peoples were eradicated or subjected to it (Sanfuentes et al. 2020, 10). Through this process, a paradoxical course of veiling and unveiling the mainland and its worlds was initiated, thus incurring in the cardinal sin over America, which was to imagine, represent and transform it into a civilisational continuity. Accordingly, for the Valparaíso School, these oxymorons embodied in the completeness of the world/globe were the circumstances that nourished its attempt to grasp the origins of the contemporary peripheral and dependent situation of South America and the South Pacific. A division created by Europe as the pre-Columbian worlds had neither the idea of continents nor the modern conception of the world/globe (Escuela de Arquitectura UCV 1970, 10).

3. Turning South America and Pacific

'How did we get to this point of universal acceptance of the ideas of America and Latin America? What was the geo-political and geo-historical framework in which this idea of America came to life?' (Mignolo 2005, 22)

These two questions posed by the Argentine scholar Walter Mignolo comprise a critical departure to examine 15 large scale maps delivered in the manuscript *For a Latin American point of view of the Pacific Ocean*, produced through the analyses of texts, maps, treaties and policies developed from the 16th century to 1960. Thus, they consider the Spanish and Portuguese colonisation period, the British, French, and North American imperialism, the invention of Latin American and the decolonisation of the nation-states in the 19th century, the World Wars, and the post-war period together with the accelerated globalisation until 1970.

Although these maps were based on modern cartography design, I identify some critical insights that nourished those compositions and their alterations, emphasising facts and ideologies traced in the review of the Americas' geo-political and geo-historical literature (figure 3). On the one hand, unlike the North, the Latin/South American hinterland has been historically represented as the backwardness of modernisation, remaining virtually as a wasteland, the savage, thus becoming an absence for traditional historicity. On the other hand, unlike the Atlantic, in Eurocentric literature and cartography, the Pacific is depicted as the remoteness of the Western World, the margins of the modern global order. Responding to these features, the maps within the manuscript depict the Pacific in the centre and not at the edges of the charts, as modern cartographers have historically reproduced it. Also, by using colours and turning the geographical charts, these illustrations emphasise the different historical landmarks that reproduced the separation between the northern and southern hemispheres.

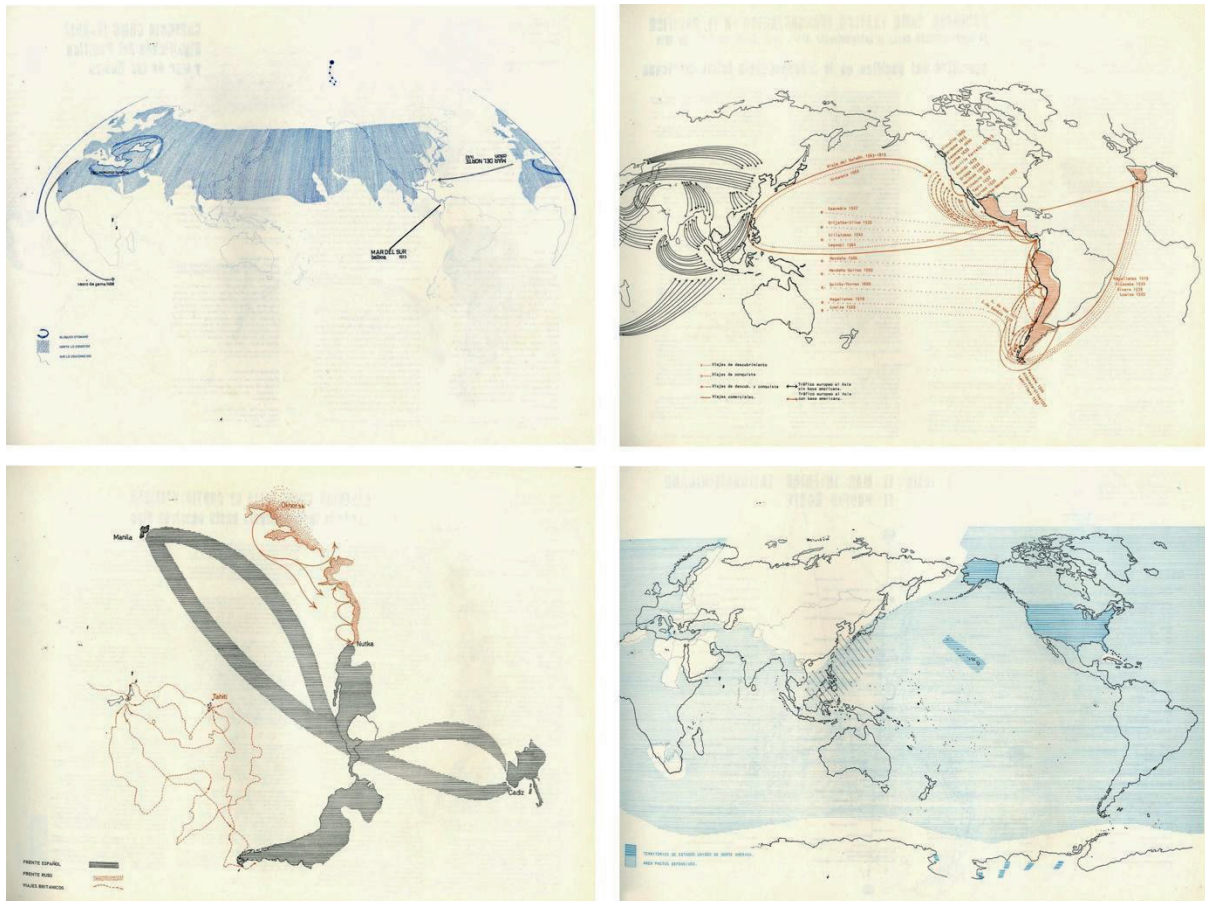


Figure 3 (top-left). This Modern World-Map represents the Pacific Ocean at the centre of the chart. During the 16th century, the North Hemisphere was the known (blue) and the South, the unknown. Figure 3 (top-right). During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Pacific was mainly dominated by Spain; the map represents voyages and discovery, conquest, and trade routes towards North America (orange) and North Asia (black) in the Pacific. Figure 3 (bottom-left). During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Spanish empire set the Cadiz, Mexico, and Manila trade route in the North Pacific (black). The Russians were conquering the Arctic (orange) and British Polynesia (orange dotted lines). Figure 3 (bottom-right). After the Second World War, the United States established international defensive pacts over the Pacific and Atlantic fronts. (Source: Cruz et al., 1971, 12, 16, 22, 26).

In addition to the ten maps on the discovery, colonisation, imperialism and decolonisation of the Americas and the Pacific, the manuscript provides an alternative point of view to de-link itself from the technocratic ideas of integration and development discussed in the *Conference of the Pacific*, delivering the Thesis of the *Interior Sea* and the *Own North*. Both theses were composed of tropes and insights developed in the poem *Amereida* and synthesised in large-scale maps that depict radical South/North and East/West projections of the Americas and the Pacific into the planetary.

On the one hand, The *Thesis of the Own North* was formerly introduced in the poem *Amereida* through the radical action of rotating the map of South America, an operation aligned with the commonly used expression of 'to have a north', which means to have an orientation or a goal (figure 4). Thus, to have an *Own* orientation, raised from the Southern hemisphere, where to have a North is to look towards the South. For this reason, the map of the thesis of the *Own North* is rotated, rising with Austral Patagonia on the top, pointing towards the Antarctic continent. As described in the Pacific conference text, 'Seen in this way, America tells us about the loneliness of its hinterland, its specific urban density on the periphery and, throughout its history, a permanent mark in this sense' (Escuela de Arquitectura UCV 1970, 15). Also, the map was turned with the Southern Cross constellation over the chart to overcome the traditional Cartesian axes of colonial cartographies, thus opening multiple orientations that emerge from these new axes and intersection. Moreover, against these geo-political logics, the geo-poetic movement on the charts is no longer representative of a process of domination but a reappropriation of modern cartography.

On the other hand, an aerial view towards the Southern Hemisphere of a South American continent without borders or geo-political frontiers, represents

the *Thesis of the Interior Sea* (figure 4). The red dots indicate the metropolises surrounding the mainland, most of them founded during colonisation in the 16th century, in what is today the core of the continental urban populations. The dark lines, crossing the chart from one Ocean to the other, signal the first conquest expeditions performed in the 15th and 16th centuries, together with the current transoceanic industrial flows through the continental hinterland. These traces were the colonial *Travesías* across the *terra incognita*. Finally, the *Interior Sea* is represented with blue lines, covering a vast blurred space of the continent where multiple traces and realities remain hidden. A vast hinterland that remains as the backyard of the great metropolises. Accordingly, through this point of view and looking forward to the correlation between the Latin American inland, the Pacific and the planet, the concern of the School is how these planetary enclaves appear and disappear from the maps according to global power relations.

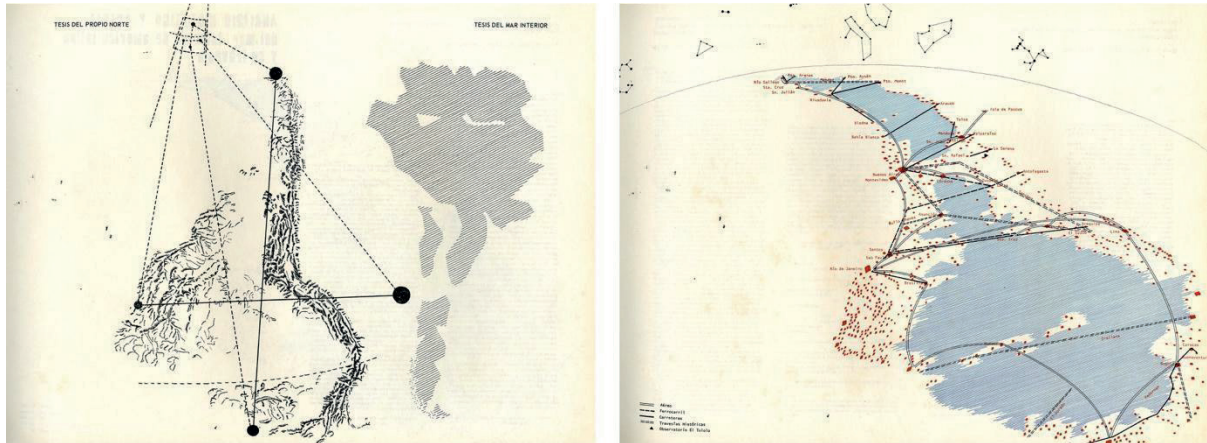


Figure 4 (left). Map representing the *Thesis of the Own North*. On the left, the South American cartography is turned, including the Southern Cross over the chart. On the right, the hatched figure depicts the South American Interior Sea. Figure 4 (right). Map representing the *Thesis of the Interior Sea*. (Source: Cruz et al., 1971, 28, 30).

3.1. Interior Sea and the Heartland Theory

To expand the geo-poetic notion of the *Interior Sea* into the geopolitical context of the Conference of the Pacific, The Valparaíso School draws an analogy with the *Heartland Theory* set out by the English geographer Halford John Mackinder (1904). One of the main aspects that relate the *Thesis of the Interior Sea* to this theory is that the latter also arises from the discovery of America and the Pacific Ocean in the 16th century, when the planet entered a closed political system of global impact, in which such territories were blocked and isolated (Mackinder 1904, 422), becoming available enclaves for a world hegemonic power. Nevertheless, while Mackinder looks at Europe, disregarding the geopolitical relevance of South America, what the School proposes through the revision of this document, is to turn its gaze towards the hinterland or Heartland of the Americas. This critical and poetic approach highlights the fact that this continent has been crucial in modern capitalist world geopolitics, but at the same time, has been dismissed as the backwardness of modernity. Therefore, by speaking of the Latin/South American *Heartland*, the School warns that, in the face of an imminent external mastery of this *Interior Sea*, the Pacific and subsequently the other *Interior Seas* throughout the world could be controlled, generating another hegemony, and consequently a new Latin American dependence in the contemporary planetary order (figure 5).

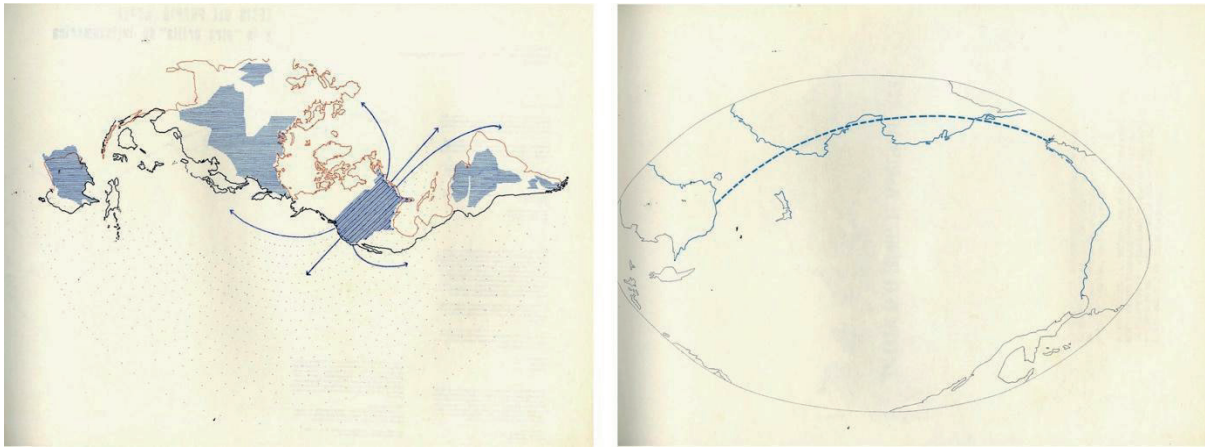


Figure 5 (left). Map of planetary Interior Seas surrounding the Pacific. Figure 5 (right) Inverted Map of the Pacific Ocean and the continental coast surrounding it. (Source: Cruz et al., 1971, 38, 40)

4. South American Interior Sea and the IIRSA Project

As we have examined, the study *For a Latin American View of the Pacific Ocean*, presented by the Valparaíso School at the *First Conference of the Pacific* in 1970, represents a seminal work in the development of the geo-poetic vision embodied by the School since the *First Travesía de Amereida* of 1965. Moreover, this manuscript together with the large-scale maps, is an attempt to expand their original geo-poetic perspective on Latin America and the Pacific towards the geo-historical and geopolitical analysis, as the means to comprehend the longstanding dependent and peripheral situation of this region in the Modern geography design, and the Western planetary order. To this end, different questions about the imaginaries, power relations and experiences embedded in the descriptions and mastery of the modern world were re-drawn to formulate the two central geo-poetic theses of the *Interior Sea* and the *Own North*, and their links to the Heartland Theory.

In this line, although Mackinder's theory is Eurocentric and deterministic, and produced more than a century ago, today, it is revisited as a relevant work in the face of the current geopolitical conflict, in which new actors, like China, and new Heartlands, like South America, come into play (Cadena 2011; Saguier 2017). In 2008 the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) was created, involving the twelve countries of the region in the development of the IIRSA Project -Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America. Today, this transnational and transoceanic urbanisation project to develop and integrate the South American hinterland into the Asian market via the Pacific is controversial. For several critical and decolonial scholars and activists, this project hides the purpose of territorial overexploitation and the subsequent deterioration of border nature and culture. Moreover, for them, this project shows how the logic of modernity/coloniality still operates over these territories. For the architect, Felipe Correa, the scope and ambitions of IIRSA are affecting an unprecedented reconfiguration of the urban and rural dynamics of the South American hinterland (Correa 2016, 1). Apart from having a substantial environmental impact on water quality, the devastation of vegetable species and the migration of fish and birds, the regional project would have severe consequences on the indigenous and peasant communities that inhabit that territory (de la Cuadra 2014, 8). However, without this network, the cities created or empowered to gain control of the territorial resources would not have the real potential they are supposed to have (Correa 2018, 7).

From a historical point of view, the IIRSA project should be understood within a history of resources and territorial control in South America (Zibechi 2006). Therefore, although control is treated in a marginal position, it remains a fundamental element to ensure the correct operation of a system of domination. This issue is inextricably linked to a structure of conquering the territories and their resources using the modern discourses and design for progress, modernisation, and development in the Global South. As stressed by the Valparaíso School 50 years ago, this longstanding hegemonic panorama about design and territories has resulted from

In this line, I have envisaged the geo-poetic thesis and maps produced by the Valparaíso School as an alternative approach to overcome the myth of supremacy and hegemony over territories – through notions such as the Global North, First, Second, and Third World – via a new critical metageography (Lewis and Wigen 1997). Thus, this geographical approach can be one of the various responses to the call for a new set of metaphors and lived realities that begin to acquire existential and epistemological significance, such as the border, the archipelago, and the sea, among others' (Maldonado-Torres 2010, 47). Consequently, I consider that the geo-poetic narrative and representations delivered in the manuscripts *For a Latin American point of view of the Pacific Ocean* (1970) and its expanded version *For a Latin American situation in the Pacific* (1970), do not reproduce the hegemonic action over the Latin-American region or elsewhere, neither the erasure of historical blueprints, but open a possibility to re-drawing and re-thinking otherwise the non-metropolitan territories.

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