

Course Syllabus

ARCH A4349 Questions in Architectural History 2

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Wednesday 11AM-1PM, Buell 300S

This two-semester introductory course is organized around selected questions and problems that have, over the course of the past two centuries, helped to define architecture's modernity. Following Questions in Architectural History 1, the Spring semester similarly treats the history of architectural modernity throughout the twentieth century as a contested, geographically and culturally uncertain category, for which periodization is both necessary and contingent. Organized thematically more than chronologically, the Spring semester also situates developments in Europe and North America in relation to worldwide processes including trade, imperialism, nationalism, and industrialization. These historical forces are transformed and complicated by forms of internationalism, post-nationalism and globalization as they encounter the impact of new generations of technology and new social, scientific, institutional, and subjective formations. As with QAH1, the course considers specific questions and problems that form around differences that are also connections, antitheses that are also interdependencies, and conflicts that are also alliances. The resulting tensions animated architectural discourse and practice throughout the period, and continue to shape our present.

Objects, ideas, and events will move in and out of the European and North American frame, with a strong emphasis on relational thinking and contextualization. This includes a historical, relational understanding of architecture itself. Although the Western tradition recognized diverse building practices as "architecture" for some time, an understanding of architecture as an academic discipline and as a profession, which still prevails today, was only institutionalized in the European nineteenth century. Thus, what we now call architecture was born not long ago, as a discourse and a practice conceived in relation to others variously described as ancient, vernacular, native, or pre-modern.

Addressed to the twentieth century legacy and transformation of institutionalization, this course also treats categories like modernity, modernization, and modernism in a relational manner. Rather than presuppose the equation of modernity with rationality, for example, the course asks: How did such an equation arise? Where? Under what conditions? In response to what? Why? To what ends? Similar questions pertain to the idea of a "national" architecture, or even a "modern" one. To explore these and other questions, the course stresses contact with primary sources. Many of the buildings,

projects, and texts we will encounter have long been incorporated into well-developed historical narratives, mostly centered on Europe. Others have not. Our aim, however, is not simply to replace those narratives with a more inclusive, “global” one. It is to explore questions that arise, at certain times and in certain places, when architecture is said to possess a history.

The course therefore prioritizes discussion and critical reflection. Students will be assigned to one of three seminar-style classes, each led by a different faculty member in collaboration with two PhD Teaching Fellows (TFs) who will conduct smaller weekly sessions intended to support and elaborate upon the main class. Faculty members may present examples of relevant buildings and projects from among those listed at their discretion.

Overall, the aim is a semester-long dialogue, with active student participation, that unfolds, explores, and contextualizes questions and problems that inform and challenge the historical imagination and ultimately, enhance historical consciousness.