

Course Syllabus

Focused on the decades after World War II, this seminar will investigate discourses and techniques of environmental governance addressed to the so-called “Third World,” those seeking to regulate not only economic production but spatial arrangements, social reproduction, and forms of subjectivity. It will do so through interrogating the intersection (or often co-constitutive realms) of architecture, media, and development aid. What role, we will ask, did architects and other experts in the built environment play not just in the design, construction and management of rural and urban environments but also in the emergence of a global governing apparatus during this period, a period marked by the transition from late-colonial rule to neocolonial counterparts informed by, and often continuing that legacy of violence? How were the discipline, profession, and discourse of architecture reconfigured during encounters with development and modernization programs? How, that is, did architecture participate in and how was it conditioned by economic, techno-scientific, political, and geopolitical strategies operating in the service of capital, and attempting to institute systematized, rationalized, and regulated forms of life and of subjectivity throughout the Global South during this historical moment? What were some of the key sites, operations, institutions, epistemologies, and media-technical substrates through which architecture came to do so?

To address these questions, the seminar will cover an interdisciplinary body of literature, beginning with select writings of Michel Foucault on questions of biopolitical forms of governance, as well as texts from Foucault’s interlocutors and critics. Second, we will turn to key texts on development and modernization during the Cold War era, including readings on the role of the United Nations and other institutions in the formation of policies and practices seeking to integrate “developing” nations into a global economic and political system. Third, we will turn to the growing literature within architectural history addressed to development, modernization, and technical assistance programs in the context of previously colonized nations, including Latin America as well as countries born of more recent decolonization struggles and independence movements. Finally, the seminar will address the instrumental, semiotic, and epistemological roles played by media, from print to audio-visual formats, including as they operate across different geographical contexts and both within architecture and beyond it. We will pay particular attention to asking what critical tools and disciplinary concerns architectural history and media theory contribute to critical discourses on development, and what in turn architecture and media might address differently. To this end, an important task of the course is to ask how we might identify, recognize, and attend to the many forms of counter-conduct, alternative knowledges, and creative forms of resistance or refusal that emerged in response to the expansion of new techno-social forms of designing and managing environments, with their distinctly northern epistemologies and imperial dispositions. We will ask what type of discursive,

subjective, spatial, media, and artistic practices speak otherwise to such instruments of capitalization and normative agendas?

Students will be expected to participate in weekly seminar discussions and to make two in-class presentations, the first related to a week of readings, the second on their research for the course. Although readings are organized to highlight methods of addressing questions of governance, development, architecture and media—as distinct from focusing on particular geographies, institutions, figures, events, scales of practice, or projects—the final paper is expected to concentrate on a particular case-study or question in its historical and discursive specificity. Further details on the final paper will be handed out and discussed in class.