



# **SPEECH AND DISCOURSE**

**A READING LIST FOR THE END OF ARCHITECTURE**

ANEESHA DHARWADKER

**TEACHING ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY IN A TIME OF "PERPETUAL WAR"**

MRINALINI RAJAGOPALAN



**Aneesha Dharwadker** is an assistant professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, with appointments in both the Illinois School of Architecture and the Department of Landscape Architecture. She is the founder of Chicago Design Office and editor of *Transect*, an annual journal of design criticism. Her scholarship examines a range of issues linked to architectural design including colonialism, globalization, and public health.

She holds a Master in Design Studies degree in History and Philosophy of Design from the Graduate School of Design, and a Bachelor of Architecture degree from Cornell University. Her work has been featured in *Baumeister*, *Writing Cities Vol. 3*, *Platform* (GSD), *Association* (Cornell AAP), and in "Form N-X00: New Forms for Citizenship," an online exhibition for the US Pavilion at the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale.



**Mrinalini Rajagopalan** is an associate professor in the Department of History of Art and Architecture at the University of Pittsburgh. While her research is focused on the architectural and urban cultures of modern India, her teaching is more globally oriented and addresses the challenges and possibilities of modern and contemporary built environments. She is the author of *Building Histories: The Archival and Affective Lives of Five Monuments in Modern Delhi* (Chicago, 2016), and co-editor of *Colonial Frames, National Histories: Imperial Legacies, Architecture, and Modernity* (Ashgate, 2012).

# A READING LIST FOR THE END OF ARCHITECTURE

ANEESHA DHARWADKER

## ABSTRACT

In an architecture classroom, the reading list can be a powerful mechanism for unraveling the history of the discipline. Like design, “history” has both a method and a medium that are subject to critique. History and the past are different constructs, and historiography plays a significant role in how design academics, curators, and practitioners frame their work. The written history of architecture is indeed an imperial body of knowledge, rife with othering narratives that reinforce European spatial practices as both universal and trailblazing.

Decolonizing design pedagogy begins with disassembling the Enlightenment-based canon. In architectural education, colonialism can no longer be marginalized, because it catalyzed many of the advancements held up as disciplinary paradigm shifts. One such example is the Industrial Revolution and its resultant urbanism, fueled by raw cotton from colonial India and American slave plantations.

The first part of this paper surveys contemporary writing relevant to architecture today, highlighting moments where deeply embedded orientalist tendencies emerge. Scholarship under scrutiny ranges from the celebrated (Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the 21st Century*, which mentions colonialism, parenthetically, only a handful of times, and Saskia Sassen’s essays on the global city, which have overlooked the globality of colonial port cities) to the mundane (the ARE 5.0 Review Manual, which still frames urban development as a self-supported western phenomenon). These and other works contribute to the enduring illusion that colonialism—capitalism’s “midwife”<sup>1</sup>—is unrelated to how our buildings, cities, and geopolitics operate today. I argue that they are in fact inextricable.

The second part offers “A Reading List for the End of Architecture” as a tool for decolonizing pedagogy:

a potential semester-long syllabus, but also a manifesto. Organized into fifteen themes paired with guiding questions, the list juxtaposes works by G. W. F. Hegel, Karl Marx, Adolf Loos, Le Corbusier, and other canonical theorists against works by Edward Said, Franz Fanon, Kamel Daoud, Gayatri Spivak, Tristram Hunt, and other contemporary thinkers disputing the persistent power imbalances that ultimately manifest architecturally. Proposed themes include “Embedded Racism in Architecture Theory,” “Historiography and the Hegelian Dialectic,” “Architecture as Colonization,” and “Architectures of Exclusion.” The list seeks to equip students of the built environment to dispute and reinvent their disciplines.

“Imperialism is total: it has economic, political, military, cultural and psychological consequences for the people of the world today.”

—Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986)

“Modern thought is a colonial enterprise.”

—Shundana Yusaf, “Decolonizing Architectural Pedagogy: Towards Cross-culturalism,” *Dialectic VII* (2019)

## DECOLONIZING THE ARCHITECTURAL MIND

In 2010, the world’s largest and most expensive home was completed as the Antilia Residence in Mumbai. Academics have paid some attention to the building, but over the past decade it has received primarily journalistic coverage.<sup>2</sup> Antilia has been heralded in mass media through a series of architectural superlatives: its height (568 feet) and cost (one billion or more USD), the largest known for a single-family residence; its sprawling, luxurious program (covered parking, corporate offices, multiple private gardens,



and a fourteen-story, 35,000-square-foot residence); its lavish interior décor; its parking capacity (160 cars); its working staff size (600); or its number of planned helipads (three, with at least one constructed). It was designed by Perkins + Will, who beat out a slate of other high-profile firms in a competition for the project.<sup>3</sup> Hirsch Bedner and Associates, an American firm with offices in fourteen countries, consulted the clients—the Ambani family—on the interior design, and an Australian company, CIMIC (then known as Leighton Holdings), executed the construction. Though embedded in the Mumbai skyline, Antilia seeks an otherworldly mystique: it is named after a mythical island west of Portugal supposedly settled by Iberian Christians in the 8th century.

This is the postmodern, postcolonial, post-recession sublime. With effectively limitless resources, an Indian industrialist can hire a Chicago-based architect, a California-based interior designer, and an Australian contractor to labor for years, producing the ultimate spatial symbol of globalization and concentrated capital with a name inspired by Mumbai's earliest European colonizers. The historic, cultural contexts of Mumbai and India are invisible in the architectural organization, aside from the unsuccessfully-executed concept of *vastu shastra*,<sup>4</sup> an architectural planning concept derived from early modern Indian design treatises which connected the earth to the cosmos through layered square and circular geometries;<sup>5</sup> certainly, South Asia's essential role as a formerly-colonized territory goes unacknowledged. The architecture erases any possibility of difference—its hanging gardens, offset floor plates, and glass walls could exist anywhere with enough investment in irrigation, structural systems, and air conditioning. The presence of unrestricted capital here reduces design agency to technical expertise and client-centered detailing, and any sense of moderation, public obligation, or social ethics is lost. The environment is an obstacle rather than an inspiration.

In *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*, Suketu Mehta writes:

The notion of what is a luxury and what is a basic need has been upended in Bombay. Every slum I see in Jogeshwari has a television;

antennas sprout in silver branches above the shanties. Many in the middle-class slums have motorcycles, even cars. People in Bombay eat relatively well, too, even the slum dwellers. The real luxuries are running water, clean bathrooms, transport and housing fit for human beings. It doesn't matter how much money you have. If you live in the suburbs, you'll either curse in your car, as you drive for two hours each way toward the center, or asphyxiate in the train compartments, even the first-class ones. The greatest luxury of all is solitude.<sup>6</sup>

Since 2004, when Mehta's book was published, Mumbai has gone from a maximum city, full of these kinds of contradictions, to a truly hyperbolic urbanism. The population of its Metropolitan Region is now more than twenty million people, packed into 1,600 square miles (an area smaller than Delaware). By 2015 there were nearly 3,300 "clusters" of slums across the city.<sup>7</sup> Dharavi, which alone shelters around a million people, registers in photography from space.<sup>8</sup> While the breadth and internal complexity of this landscape is itself a startling phenomenon, more sobering are the adjacencies of these zones to their well-appointed neighbors. For instance, a network of about three square miles of slums lies immediately next to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, now famous for its international Terminal 2 constructed by Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill in 2014. The view flying into this terminal is a sea of corrugated plastic and metal roofs, India's dominant signifier of an incremental and particulate urbanism.

In this context, Antilia embodies how global forces—labor, capital, materials, technology, and expertise—converge to produce architecture that ultimately fails the public and the environment. The price, as it were, of solitude. The dubious ethics of the program, perpetuating extreme wealth through real estate in a postcolonial city that cannot adequately house all its people, are legitimized because the building is sustainable and, in the words of the architect, "interesting"; sustainability, especially, is used in this case as a self-justifying end.<sup>9</sup> Yet if a "green" building still generates monthly energy bills in the 100,000 USD range and encourages the high carbon footprints of its inhabitants, any technological progress it claims is



superficial.<sup>10</sup> *The Guardian* has aptly christened this genre “surreal estate.”<sup>11</sup>

How did we get here? What confluence of architectural epistemologies, ethical frameworks, and design practice methods made this project acceptable, even desirable and defensible? What disciplinary-scale failures had to occur for designers to offer their services so eagerly to such clients? Economic inequality and a neoliberal turn in high-end architectural practice play a significant role, but architectural theory and design pedagogy are also complicit. Antilia’s gross incongruity in its setting reinforces that contemporary architecture theory, and the way it is taught, is still too narrow to accommodate the postcolonial conditions that will continue to be the sites of prominent design projects in the future. The universalizing impulses in canonical architecture literature, which is rooted primarily in a Germanic Enlightenment-based body of work, translate into universalized forms, programs, materials, and technologies in built work. To unsettle these deeply embedded tendencies, the teaching of architectural theory can be “decolonized” to introduce multiple, and at times productively conflicting, perspectives anchored in other parts of the world.

This essay explores one method for decolonizing design pedagogy: rethinking the core architecture theory syllabus. The syllabus presented here merges design history, historiography, and philosophy into the larger category of theory, suggesting that each of these paradigms cannot be sufficiently contextualized without the others. We can no longer read architecture “history” written from a Eurocentric or universalist perspective without examining the underlying biases of the authors; likewise, practitioners today can no longer depend on universalizing philosophies like *sustainability* to exclusively guide their project designs. In postcolonial contexts, these universalist attitudes have been responsible for creating and perpetuating the very crises—economic, cultural, social—that architects and urban designers are now attempting to solve through technological remedies. Antilia, for instance, is an anti-historical, ethically-compromised, and resource-heavy building masquerading as a symbol of sustainability in a deeply troubled urban context. By restructuring the pedagogy of architecture theory, we can push back against the catastrophic impulse to design and build

in universal terms. The proposed syllabus maintains a sequence of Enlightenment-based works, but places them in context and in contradistinction to literatures that challenge their authority.

## DECOLONIZING THEORY

Confronting the Eurocentrism and ethnocentrism at the center of architecture theory requires two key actions. The first is to re-read early canonical works, like those written by Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, or Karl Marx, using new mechanisms of critique. Postcolonial studies in particular offers a set of tools and epistemological reframings that empower architectural scholars to take on this challenge; these include embracing multiple modernities around the world, as suggested by Jyoti Hosagrahar in her extensive study of urbanism in Delhi.<sup>12</sup> Though four decades old, Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, published in 1978, continues to offer intellectual tools for understanding and dismantling the epistemological imbalances in literature, art, and historical writing that emerged from imperialism and colonialism. Two decades ago, Gayatri Spivak unpacked the subjective agency and othering in postcolonial or subaltern conditions, equipping us to re-read Kant, Hegel, Marx, and their intellectual descendants like Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze with an equal clarity.<sup>13</sup> Franz Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, and Paul Gilroy—giving representation to the most deeply suppressed voices in history, those of Africans and the African diaspora—describe the psychic impact of colonization on the colonized. Juxtaposing these works within the frame of architecture theory, rather than depending on the canon alone to continue carrying the full intellectual weight of the discipline, is the first act of decolonization. It is the first act of acknowledgement that our disciplinary mind is a colonial one. It is the first act of acknowledgement that a colonial mind is not a healthy and just place from which to operate.

As a second step, we need to critique the ways in which imperialist positions, seeded in the current theoretical canon, continue to shape scholarship on globalization, urbanism, and design today. The impulse to imperialize and universalize the European experience is most evident when we examine what is ignored, diminished, or consciously suppressed in literature dealing with late capitalist architecture, urbanism, geography,

and global space: namely, voices, perspectives, geographies, and histories of the world that has evolved in a manner not commensurate with Europe. When this massive body of knowledge is missing from required design curricula, and harbored in specialized elective courses instead, students assume that Eurocentric architectural concepts and solutions are universally appropriate defaults. If you are from any other part of the world, from rural economies, part of the pastoral cultures, the inability to find yourself in the canon leads to self-censorship. Cultural captivity leads to identification with the cultural values and discourse of the culprit. Philosopher George Yancy calls this epistemic violence.<sup>14</sup> When architecture students are exposed *only* to that early European canon, and contemporary scholarship that *only* builds upon and reinforces it, the discipline becomes caught in a cycle of misrepresentation and myopia. Far from making knowledge an instrument of empowerment, it destroys the ability of architects to operate successfully in unfamiliar contexts. The theoretical framework and educational scope of the discipline continue to be limited in this way.

There would be no capitalism or modernity without imperialism and colonialism. As Ania Loomba writes, European colonialisms “produced the economic imbalance that was necessary for the growth of European capitalism and industry. Thus we could say that colonialism was the midwife that assisted at the birth of European capitalism, or that without colonial expansion the transition to capitalism could not have taken place in Europe.”<sup>15</sup> In its spatiality and economic structure, colonialism transformed the way the globe operates: it activated the transition from a mercantile to an industrial global economy and depended upon a decentralized or outsourced means of production. The effects of colonialism did not end with post-war decolonization, and they are certainly not limited to colonized spaces. For example, Manchester and Liverpool would not have undergone such dramatic urban transformations during the Industrial Revolution without a massive influx of raw cotton from colonial India and American slave plantations. To bring the issue closer to home, the United States is nothing but an amalgam of colonized territories. Native Americans continue to this day to be colonized. This is not a condition merely of the past. It very much shapes

our present. Therefore, examining the way in which today’s literature continues to suppress this history is essential.

Four very different thinkers are briefly reviewed here to demonstrate how the problem of suppression infiltrates architectural thinking in its economic, sociological, formal, and technical dimensions. The influential Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* examines capital movement and accumulation primarily within the boundaries of the French nation-state. Although this is noted only in passing in the book, France was the second largest modern empire, and went through an internal transformation due to its external colonial activities, particularly during its second wave of imperialism (1830-1980). One cannot analyze France’s economic history, and 21st-century capital in general, without taking the extent of imperialist expansion into account. The central point missing from Piketty’s analysis is that modern capitalism, and the vast inequalities it has produced, would not have existed without colonialism. The book’s meticulous detailing of land ownership and capital accumulation within France suggests that the empire’s economy operated within the geographic boundaries of the metropole. This type of writing is an epistemic violence. As in a multitude of other literatures, colonial activities are treated in Piketty’s work as side effects of empire rather than as its catalysts—that colonialism “happened” elsewhere and therefore had little effect on the colonizer and capitalist modernity at home. Piketty perpetuates the conceit of colonial enterprises. His influential books sustain the untenable view that capitalist modernity developed the metropole (home state) through global-scale flows of people, resources, and capital to and from their hinterlands (colonized territories). His well-respected work continues to mask those very flows and suppresses their contribution to modernity.

Piketty focuses on what is tactile and traceable in terms of capital flow and accumulation, like receipts, income tax forms, and land deeds. But the inverse, which is also significant, is missing: the capital *saved* by the colonial empire through exploitative activities like slavery, indentured servitude, or appropriated natural resource extraction. In 1878, Dadabhai Naoroji termed this concept the “drain” theory of colonialism.<sup>16</sup> In

short, the capital *not* spent by colonial governments on labor wages or natural resources that were, in effect, stolen, produces a drain of resources from the colonized territory. This amounts to an extraction of capital that is untraceable but still essential to the structure and narrative of modern capitalism. Naoroji's theory focused on British India in detail, but in concept applies to French activities in Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean as well.<sup>17</sup>

Saskia Sassen's *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, and her subsequent works suffer from similar limitations—namely, an unwillingness to center colonial activities in discussions of capitalism and globalization. On multiple occasions, Sassen has argued that globalization is a recent phenomenon, hinging on the free flow of financial resources and services across international borders. Cities overtake nation-states as the primary spatial actors in this new context, functioning as interdependent but essentially equal nodes in a planetary-scale web. However, when examined in the context of colonialism, the author's foundational hypotheses for what constitutes the contemporary "global city," described primarily as a result of 20th-century policies, actually rely on centuries-old patterns of inter-regional and colonial behavior.<sup>18</sup> Before European oceanic exploration, cities in China, South Asia, North Africa, and the Mediterranean behaved very much in the way Sassen describes, as specialized hubs of goods and services connected by evolving forms of infrastructure. During colonialism they received an influx of foreign capital, but this exchange was not between two equal economic actors; rather, it was between two entities with an extreme power imbalance. Sassen's framework does not make room for this historical phenomenon as a catalyst for contemporary conditions, nor does it allow for a pre-20th-century globality centered somewhere other than in Europe. The repeated refraction of globalization through the lens of the European nation-state limits Sassen's conceptual apparatus and diminishes the complexities and alternatives offered by other, older conditions.

Patrik Schumacher's work on parametricism links this instinct for omission directly to current architecture practice. Schumacher's mission to totalize (or, in his words, unify) the discipline stretches across

time and space. He frames architectural history and theory through modernism, postmodernism, and deconstructivism as a series of ideas and works leading inevitably to parametricism, the most extreme distancing yet of architects from direct authorship over their work. Schumacher's seeming neutrality, achieved through the computer screen, again masks privileges and attitudes that arise from Eurocentric, i.e., self-centric, thinking and education. He dismisses what he calls the "garbage spill" of a pluralistic urbanism (he does not identify Dubai, Mumbai, or Shanghai specifically, but makes it clear that this designation refers to cities outside the Cartesian definitions of order).<sup>19</sup> Combined with his views on public housing in London and the free market, this reveals his inability to see beyond, and therefore critique, the order/chaos, Occident/Orient, civilized/barbaric and other binaries outlined by Said and others.<sup>20, 21</sup>

The problem of omission extends even to the most mundane of publications: the ARE 5.0 exam study manual, by David Kent Ballast and Steven E. O'Hara. This primarily technical guide contains a chapter on urban history, again compressed into a worn narrative beginning with Rome, making its way to London and Paris, to New York, Philadelphia, Savannah, and Radburn, and finally concluding with New Urbanism. Although this book is specifically for designers studying to pass American licensing exams, it is yet one more example of how a Eurocentric history becomes "history," positioning itself as harmless and factual. The omission of urbanisms from other parts of the world is at this point taken completely for granted.

## DECOLONIZING PEDAGOGY

In an architecture classroom, the reading list can be a powerful mechanism for unraveling entrenched disciplinary assumptions and filling in knowledge that has been systematically suppressed. The following proposal suggests "a reading list for the end of architecture," not arguing for the end of the *discipline*, but rather for a disciplinary *realignment*, putting elements of the architectural theory canon in a new context (Figures 1 and 2). This reading list takes the form of a semester-long syllabus, and if deployed as an introductory theory seminar or a history of architecture course; it would equip students to question the



**A Reading List for the End of Architecture (or, How to Think about Things)**

**1: The Shadows of Enlightenment**  
 Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*. Trans. Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987. pp. 97-123.  
 Kant, Immanuel. "An Answer to the Question, What is Enlightenment?" In Schmidt, James. *What Is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.  
 Guha, Ranajit. *History at the Limit of World-History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. pp. 7-47.

**2: Orientalism and Universalism**  
 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *The Philosophy of History*. Trans. J. Sibree. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991. pp. 1-27, 111-115, 139-147, and 412-427.  
 Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979. pp. 1-28 and 201-254.  
 Fanon, Franz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 1968. pp. 35-69 and 148-167.

**3: Historiography and the Hegelian Dialectic**  
 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*. Trans. Bernard Bosanquet and M. J. Inwood. London; New York: Penguin Books, 2004. pp. 82-97.  
 Upadhyay, Shashi Bhushan. *Historiography in the Modern World: Western and Indian Perspectives*. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2016. pp. 1-11, 157-166, and 679-702.  
 Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999. pp. 198-227.  
 Buck-Morss, Susan. *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009. E-book. pp. 3-20 and 79-86. <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.

**4: Labor, Capitalism, and Industrialized World Order**  
 Engels, Friedrich. *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*. Trans. Florence Kelley. New York: J.W. Lovell Co., 1887.  
 Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Trans. Ben Fowkes and Ernest Mandel. London: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1990.  
 Achebar, Gilbert. *Marxism, Orientalism, Cosmopolitanism*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013. pp. 68-102.

**5: Colonialist Landscape, Postcolonial Outlook**  
 Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. New York: Bantam Books, 1902.  
 Gilroy, Paul. *Postcolonial Melancholia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005. pp. 1-57.

**6: Constructing Estrangement**  
 Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*. New York: Vintage Books, 1946.  
 Daoud, Kamel. *The Mersault Investigation*. Trans. John Cullen. New York: Other Press, 2015.

**7: Hidden Theories of Architecture and Landscape**  
 Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993. pp. 1-40.  
 Beckert, Sven. *Empire of Cotton*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014. pp. ix-xxii, 3-28, and 199-241.

Figure 1: Proposed reading list, page 1.  
 Source: Aneesha Dharwadkar, 2018.

disciplinary establishment and the hegemony of Enlightenment-based ideas early in their careers. The list is built around the idea of comparative reading, or juxtaposition.<sup>22</sup> It places canonical theory in context by offering perspectives from other disciplines as vehicles for critique. Equally important, it establishes difference and embraces its ambiguities. As a material practice, architecture risks continued complicity in social inequality by remaining in a reactive stance—designing to client desires or developer pro formas—rather than deploying self-initiated social and ethical agency. Learning architecture through epistemologies of difference, like those offered by postcolonial studies and related subjects, is one way to encourage more progressive, issues-based design practices capable of operating at a heterogeneous planetary scale. At this point in time, the *exclusion* of this material hampers the full global and historical consciousness of the discipline.

**8: Reconsidering the Paradigm Shift**  
 Howard, Ebenezer. *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*. London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., Ltd., 1902.  
 Garnier, Tony. *Une Cité Industrielle: Étude Pour La Construction Des Villes*. Paris: C. Massin & cie, 1932.  
 Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 1969. pp. 217-251.  
 Beckert, Sven. *Empire of Cotton*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014. pp. 83-135.

**9: The Discipline of Architecture**  
 Piranesi, Giovanni Battista. *The Prisons: (Le Carceri): The Complete First and Second States*. New York: Dover Publications, 1973.  
 Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1979. pp. 195-248.  
 King, Martin Luther, Jr. *Letter From Birmingham City Jail*. Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee, 1963.

**10: Reframing Globalization**  
 Sassen, Saskia. *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001. pp. 3-36, 171-196, and 329-344.  
 Piketty, Thomas. "The Metamorphoses of Capital." *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014. pp. 113-139.  
 Bayart, Jean-François. "The Paradoxical Invention of Economic Modernity." In *Globalization*, ed. Arjun Appadurai. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001. pp. 307-334.  
 Hunt, Tristram. *Cities of Empire: The British Colonies and the Creation of the Urban World*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014. pp. 3-18, 141-182, and 261-302.

**11: New World Orders**  
 Lewis, Simon L. and Mark A Maslin. *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene*. London: Pelican Books, 2018. pp. 1-78 and 147-187.  
 Khanna, Parag. *Connectography: Mapping the Future of Global Civilization*. New York: Random House, 2016. pp. 35-60 and 327-345.  
 Bélanger, Pierre, and Alexander S. Arroyo. *Ecologies of Power: Countermapping the Logistical Landscapes & Military Geographies of the U.S.* Department of Defense. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016.

**12: Superimpositions**  
 Rhys, Jean. *Wide Sargasso Sea*. London: World Books, 1967.  
 Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. New York: Random House, 2006.  
 Smith, Zadie. *White Teeth*. New York: Random House, 2000.

Figure 2: Proposed reading list, page 2.  
 Source: Aneesha Dharwadkar, 2018.

This reading list grapples with some of the same issues that the Global Architectural History Teaching Collaborative (GAHTC) has encountered. One issue worth noting is that the burden of robust global knowledge falls disproportionately on scholars and practitioners of and from subaltern, postcolonial, or still-colonized environments. Battles against white supremacy have been led by people of color; battles against sexism by women; battles for trans rights by the non-conforming. Likewise, with respect to issues of architecture, globalization, and decolonizing design pedagogy, the intellectual labor is carried out by the historically silenced, specifically for an audience that is only now, in an era of tattered American politics, coming to terms with the limitations of its own history and values.

## DECOLONIZING PRACTICE

Decolonizing practice will expand architecture into a set of activities that can sensitively and appropriately respond to today's spatial, infrastructural, and urbanistic crises all over the globe. To achieve this we need to decolonize theory, and to decolonize theory we need to decolonize pedagogy. Reexamining the universalizing thrust of architecture's 19th-century foundational theory, questioning its presence in today's scholarship, and expanding design pedagogy to accommodate contrasting viewpoints are all tangible ways of altering how architects perceive and intervene in the world. Architecture practice increasingly demands a level of self-reflection that I believe is becoming possible now due to our unique confluence of politics, digital media, and expanding diversity in the discipline. Decolonizing pedagogy offers a way of un-making the biased structures of the world that can seem immovable.

As global design practices continue to expand their footprints and impact, it is important to emphasize that the sites of intervention for new architectures have radically shifted since the 1980s. Firms like SOM, Foster + Partners, Safdie Architects, HOK, Gensler, AECOM, and of course Perkins + Will now have branch offices in the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and China. These firms are planning entire communities and urban infrastructure systems for Delhi, Jeddah, Rabat, Jakarta, Abuja, Ahmedabad, Nairobi, Mumbai, and Van Phong Bay. These new sites of intervention have intersected with colonialism in a variety of ways, especially under British and French regimes. If architects aim to be successful in designing for these places, the discipline must absorb the knowledge of postcolonial spaces, and the epistemologies of postcolonial studies, into its most basic pedagogical activities.

Important work is already being done in various smaller-scale urban, academic, and design practice contexts that takes up this urgent task. One recent example is the renaming of the public Square du Bastion in Brussels after Patrice Lumumba, the Congolese independence fighter and politician.<sup>23</sup> It is a highly unusual move; we are far more likely to see streets in Cape Town and New Delhi named after Dutch and

British colonial figures. But this acknowledgement of a colonial past through the naming of public space in the European metropole is a step toward shifting colonial and postcolonial discourses into a new physical space.

In design academia, the work of Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha, Ananya Roy, V. Mitch McEwen, Parag Khanna, Vikramaditya Prakash, Rahul Mehrotra, and the GAHTC, among others, encourages architecture, landscape, and planning to confront multiple modernities and the issues that arise from different forms of colonization. The 2018 United States Pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale, "Dimensions of Citizenship," included several participants in both the physical and online exhibitions who dealt directly with the manifestations of race, colonialism, and inequality in space and across time. In design practice, we can see the emergence of several young individuals and organizations who clearly have progressive aims, who want to rethink the tendencies of large-scale corporate practices by specifically choosing to work on underrepresented sites, programs, and themes, and who do not necessarily follow a capitalist bottom line: MASS Design Group, Assemble, Borderless, Latent Design, f-architecture, Center for Urban Pedagogy, Rebuild Foundation, Project H Design, studio:indigenous, and Léopold Lambert's *The Funambulist* are a few examples among many.

Paul Gilroy wonders in *Postcolonial Melancholia* what contemporary medium might unify people across differences (particularly racial, but also economic and political). My answer will always be architecture. But it must be an architecture greatly expanded from what we see today, carried out by diverse practitioners who balance technical expertise with strong ethical and political positions; practitioners who leverage local conditions rather than ignoring or transcending them, and who work toward greater specificity and difference. In a time of increasing inequalities everywhere, including the built environment, architects' responsibilities are expanding even as our agency shrinks: decolonizing pedagogy is one mechanism that can empower us to reverse this trend. ■

## ENDNOTES

1. Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 4.
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# TEACHING ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY IN A TIME OF "PERPETUAL WAR"

MRINALINI RAJAGOPALAN

## ABSTRACT

In this essay I ask how architectural history courses might provoke would-be architects, planners, and civil engineers to think deeply about the ethics and politics of intervening in built environments. Most American students came of age in a post-9/11 world marked by U.S. military aggression around the world. What does it mean to teach architectural history to a generation who has only known the world as it exists in a state of perpetual war? What ethical imperatives must architectural history take on at this contemporary moment marked by rising nationalism and ecological crises? I argue that architectural history must be cognizant of and present a challenge to three assumptions frequently made by architecture students: that geo-politics have no bearing or relevance to built form; that citizenship (how I enact belonging and enfranchisement) is separate from my autonomous expression as a designer; and that the classroom is a space of exception that absolves me from responsibilities to a larger world. I press for new presentations of architectural history, those that develop humanistic imaginations alongside design creativity and empower students to become responsible interlocutors in their contemporary built environments.

## A COSMOPOLITANISM OF ESTRANGEMENT

The undergraduates in my classes at the University of Pittsburgh were between three and five years old when the Twin Towers fell on 9/11. They might have started high school when Tahrir Square was the center of a massive revolution, and gone to prom just as historic Aleppo was turned to rubble. Whilst many have never left the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. where they

grew up, cities like Mosul and Pyongyang and exurban places such as Guantanamo Bay and the U.S.-Mexico border are part of their global imaginaries as well as vocabularies. This is a peculiar cosmopolitanism, produced by the aggressive military domination of large parts of the globe by the U.S. It is a knowledge of the other that implicates the self as perpetrator of large and small wars. What does it mean, then, to teach architectural history to a generation that has only known the world as it exists in a state of perpetual war? Do architectural historians in the U.S. have a moral and ethical imperative to respond to the exigencies of this moment in their writing and teaching? If so, how can academics and practitioners recognize our complicity in creating the conditions of such estranged cosmopolitans even as we prepare students to live, work, and play within a complex world shaped by U.S. aggression?<sup>1</sup>

My theoretical rudder for this essay is the framework of cosmopolitanism. I borrow the term "perpetual war" in the essay title from philosopher Bruce Robbins, who uses it to critique Immanuel Kant's exegesis on cosmopolitanism. Kant articulated cosmopolitanism as an allegiance to the entire human race as opposed to one's own tribal, ethnic, or national communities—a moral and ethical posture of fraternity that would lead to "perpetual peace" in the world. This early model of global citizenship, and in our contemporary parlance a set of basic human rights, was based on the shared humanity of the world's peoples. Robbins has challenged such rosy Enlightenment thinking, instead arguing that cosmopolitanism today emerges from perpetual war—a paradoxical condition of knowing others intimately but only as a threat to oneself or in the very act of destroying them.<sup>2,3</sup> Philosopher Martha Nussbaum has articulated cosmopolitanism as the loyalties that an individual owes to humanity as a

whole. She points out, however, that such a capacious worldview is often at odds with, or at least exists in an uneasy relationship with, nationalism—which demands allegiances that are both geographically and historically determined.<sup>4</sup> Anthony Kwame Appiah has defined cosmopolitanism as the ethics of engagement with difference. He asks: What do we owe those who look, speak, and live differently from us and how do we reconcile such boundless obligations with the demands of our local communities, the nation-states that we carry passports for, or the proscriptions of our religious identity?<sup>5</sup> These questions have profound ramifications for students who are training to design in unfamiliar environments and for clients and communities who are vastly different from themselves. It has become especially urgent for designers to cultivate responsible imaginations of the past when revanchist nationalisms around the world co-opt both history and space to service their agendas.

In this essay I ask how architectural history courses might provoke would-be architects, planners, and civil engineers to think deeply about the ethics and politics of intervening in built environments. More specifically, I believe that curricular offerings of architectural histories should be mindful of three traps that design students are prone to: that the history of built form and design evolution are entirely separate from geopolitical context and influence; that citizenship (the privilege to receive and enact enfranchisements) is separate from the autonomous expression of a designer; and that the classroom (or architectural firm) is a space of exception that absolves students (and later professionals) from responsibilities to a larger world. I argue for new presentations of architectural history that encourage students to develop humanistic imaginations alongside design creativity, with imaginations that will empower them as responsible interlocutors in their contemporary built environments.

#### MYTH 1: THE TELEOLOGY OF DESIGN HISTORY

Several recent textbooks have taken up the work of democratizing and globalizing architectural history beyond a Hegelian narrative of progress that proceeds from primitive to civilized and one that locates architectural innovation to a single genius, usually a literate white male.<sup>6, 7</sup> Yet many other texts in the

discipline perpetuate a specious teleology from past to present, low tech to high tech, vernacular and anonymous to monumental and authored, unfamiliar to familiar. Can students then be blamed for seeing themselves as the torchbearers of the next phase of architectural evolution, or of assuming that innovation and avant-garde design are the only paths to keep the wheels of progress running in the right direction?<sup>8</sup> Such an understanding of architectural history becomes doubly problematic when seen in the context of contemporary geo-politics, where the very real struggles of First Nations and Indigenous peoples to claim resources and rights are frequently dismissed as atemporal or antagonistic to the universalizing logic of capitalism. How might architectural history curricula encourage students to think of multiple trajectories of building that develop horizontally across disparate temporalities? What sort of narrative imagination is required to hold these chronologies in equal regard and how might professors equip them with such an imagination? I offer a reading of a first-society structure as a beginning to such an understanding.

#### *Beginnings: The Thule Whalebone House*

Like all disciplines, architectural history is attached to its origin myths. The 18th-century abbé, Marc-Antoine Laugier, explained that Greek classical architecture, the apogee of built aesthetics, could be traced to the primitive hut, rudimentary shelters erected by early peoples consisting of four supporting columns and a pitched roof (all made with unfinished tree branches). In Laugier's appraisal, while the Parthenon is a sophisticated evolution of the primitive hut, the latter constituted a universal language of rationalism and aesthetics. At the heart of Laugier's discussion in his *Essay on Architecture* (1755) is the prowess of early man [sic] to harness and shape natural resources (tree branches) into a shelter built along the principles of an ideal form (free-standing columns supporting a roof pediment). Such was the articulation of architectural beginnings borne out of European Enlightenment assumptions: the triumph of culture over nature; the universalism of aesthetic and form; and, most importantly, the individual builder who determines the course of architectural history to come. A key motif in this allegory is that of human exceptionalism and the distinction between humans and environments.

The primitive hut becomes one origin of civilization precisely because man [sic] is able to separate himself from his natural environment and exercise control over it.

An alternative to this teleology would be a consideration of the Thule whalebone house within the continuum of design experimentation and building skills. Remnants of semi-subterranean whalebone houses built by the Thule between 1000-1600 CE have been found in various parts of Alaska, Greenland, and the Canadian Arctic Circle (Figure 1). As Peter Dawson and Richard Levy have shown, building with whalebone would require considerable knowledge of engineering, for the material, though strong and light, is not uniform in terms of shape or dimensions.<sup>9</sup> Whalebone was a precious commodity and the Thule used as much of the mammal's skeleton as possible in the construction of the house.

The distinct shapes of each whalebone, however, made every Thule whalebone house unique in its formal and structural properties. Cranial bones of whales (broad at the base of the head and tapering towards the snout) were similar to tripods and were best used as vertical members, and jaw bones (mandibles) were used as ridgepoles to span across the two lobes. Smaller rib bones could be used for interstitial spans and to support the weight of the hide, sod, and turf that would cover the entire house. The process of building a whalebone house was complex: the pits for the houses could not be dug in advance, as it was not certain that the available whalebones could span the depressions once dug. Instead, the bones were first arranged to achieve the optimal ratio of structural stability and inhabitable space and the areas for the pits were marked out. The skeletal structure was then dismantled for the pits to be dug, and subsequently re-erected over the completed pits.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 1: Thule Whalebone House, c. 1000 CE, Greenland; built by ancestors of modern-day Inuit in Northern Alaska who migrated eastward, across the Arctic to Greenland. It is near the community of Resolute and part of remnants from about six other houses. Courtesy: Timkal



Architectural lessons from the Thule whalebone house abound: for one, such building was a collective act requiring sophisticated communication between hunters, tanners, and builders; second, it was premised on specialized knowledge related to accessing and utilizing resources, an understanding of the laws of physics and structural systems, and the skill to arrange available bones to ensure safety and comfort; and third, this architecture arose from a multi-species dialogue between humans, animals, and flora. In its sophistication, the Thule whalebone house dismantles Laugier’s myths of the “primitive” and that of a singular “man” as the first author of an ideal architectural form (Figure 2). In this example, genius—if such exists—is widely distributed and cannot be located in one



Figure 2: Charles Eisen, engraving for the frontispiece of the second edition of *Abbé Laugier’s Essai sur l’architecture*, trans. *Essay on Architecture*, 1753. Courtesy: Public Domain.

temporal moment, much less a single persona. In stark contrast with Laugier’s universalism that divides human and environment, the example of the Thule whalebone house presents an entry into discussions of the Anthropocene and planetary ecology. A critical view of human exceptionalism and natural resource extraction will be vital to future designers of the built environment.<sup>11</sup>

## MYTH 2: CITIZENSHIP AND DESIGN

Everyday undergraduates across campuses in the United States perform quotidian acts of citizenship: they exercise sovereign control over their bodies, participate in free speech, and make choices based on their free will. Many architectural students also enact their role as designers within this larger set of enfranchisements, often without critically understanding the specific privileges that allow them to do so. Needless to say, the diversity of the undergraduate student body at any North American university means that such privilege is fraught with race, gender, and economic status. The persistent absence of minorities such as African-Americans, women, and non-literate subjects in architectural histories only exacerbates the divide between design and citizenship.<sup>12</sup> It is vital for future designers to understand that social enfranchisement and disenfranchisement are spatially reproduced and to calibrate their own interventions within these milieu responsibly.

### *Building Our Nation: The View from Mulberry Row*

Thomas Jefferson’s estate at Monticello is one example of the manner in which design perpetuates an unequal field of power relations (Figure 3). Jefferson is seen as the consummate American innovator and designer. His estate at Monticello, and later his design of the University of Virginia, drew on Greek classical architectural form to communicate his democratic and republic idealism. There is a sufficient amount of mythologizing in these statements to warrant critique. Yet, the founding father’s estate illustrates how sovereign self-determination and dehumanization were both embedded in the design of Monticello.

Dell Upton argues that Jefferson designed his residence and arranged the rooms and décor in



Figure 3: Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's Home and Estate, Charlottesville, Virginia, 1753. Courtesy: Martin Falbisoner.

his house as a way to announce his belief in self-determination and democracy. The vantage of his own house was such that it looked down on Mulberry Row—the slave quarters—and allowed him to survey his property, which included land as well as enslaved human beings. Where the spaces in Jefferson's house were distinguished by function (the salon, the library, or the dining room), the slave quarters accommodated multiple functions: cooking, dressing, sleeping, and tending to children in one undifferentiated space. Where Jefferson's house was designed with an eye towards spaces that were more public and others that were intensely private, the arrangement of the slave quarters further dehumanized the residents, placing women, men, and children in a forced intimacy with little care for prevailing social norms of comfort, privacy, or propriety. In a dazzlingly ingenious, if heartless design, Jefferson invented a system of pulleys and dumbwaiters that fueled the fireplaces in his bedroom. Slaves fed the coal into dumbwaiters in the basement of the house but Jefferson's designs kept them out of his sight and their bodies out of his spaces. Upton articulates it succinctly when he says that plantation houses such as Monticello were "technologies of the self, tools for defining their owners." In contrast, the accommodations on Mulberry Row were the infrastructure by which slaves were turned into technologies of labor and reproduction

that serviced the master's needs.<sup>13</sup> Monticello's spatial choreography was designed to reproduce the power relations between master and slave, enfranchised and disenfranchised, and literate and laboring. The design of democracy was thus built and maintained on the infrastructure of dehumanization.

The substantial links between racial theories and modern architectural theory and production has provoked an ethical reckoning within the discipline.<sup>14,15</sup> To operate responsibly as a designer today is to recognize this history of uneven enfranchisements and its persistent ramifications for the built environment. Curricular reform initiated by scholars such as Kathryn Anthony at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign have actively shown how design "naturalizes" the discrimination of women, racial minorities, and persons with atypical bodies.<sup>16</sup> Her 2010 congressional testimony on the restroom gender parity act serves as a model for how designers can bring critical awareness to the politics of the built environment.<sup>17</sup>

### MYTH 3: STUDIO AS A SPACE OF EXCEPTION

Too often undergraduates see their classrooms and studios as rarefied environments that exist entirely outside a broader socio-political milieu (Figure 4). This fiction is insidiously reproduced by popular rhetoric



Figure 4: Classroom as a space of exception, Undergraduate Studio at the University of Utah, Fall 2018.  
Courtesy: Stephanie King.

that the “real world” is fundamentally separate from college life and environments. Studios frequently cultivate an ambience of pure abstraction and creative largesse, encouraging students to ignore histories of place, capitalist networks of profit and loss, or racial and gendered inequities that might be operating on site. Instead, context is defined in terms of “tangible” data such as topography, transportation networks, desirable views, or space management.

As future designers, it is imperative that students be cognizant of their studio and larger campus environments as spaces of production: not simply the production of ideas, but also of social realities. Jonathan Massey, dean of the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan, poignantly notes that the structure of architecture studios, with late nights and time-intensive coursework, necessarily excludes non-traditional students such as parents, persons with disabilities, or those who must work to pay for college.<sup>18</sup> Massey rightly points out that such exclusions of class and social rank are further exacerbated in the architectural profession, creating a vicious cycle of elitism. How might architectural history be employed to shed light on such issues?

*Learned Forgetting: The al-Qarawiyyin Mosque and Madrasa*

We may consider the al-Qarawiyyin mosque, and later madrasa, as an example of how discursive spaces

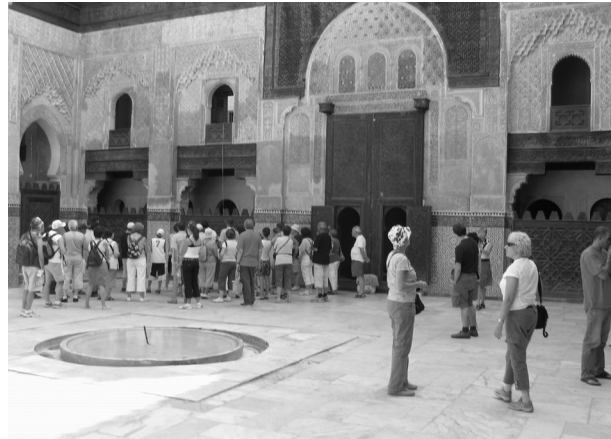


Figure 5: Courtyard of Al-Qarawiyyin mosque and madrasa, Fez, Morocco, established in 859 CE.  
Courtesy: Lietmotiv

such as academic campuses actively reproduce the prevailing social order of the time. In 859, a wealthy and educated woman, Fatimah al-Fihri, established the al-Qarawiyyin mosque in Fez, modern-day Morocco (Figure 5). Soon after, the Almoravid and Marinid sultans (12th and 13th centuries) expanded the scholastic program of the al-Qarawiyyin mosque and madrasas to make it the leading center of learning in the medieval Mediterranean world.<sup>19</sup> One way to present this building as a historical case study would be to focus on the hypostyle hall of the mosque, the intricate *muqarnas* over its main *mihrab* (prayer niche), the minaret, and courtyard of the mosque. An equally important history of al-Qarawiyyin, however, focuses on its conflicted nature as producing some of the greatest male thinkers of the time while denying the same opportunities of scholarship to women.

The madrasa would go on to produce a remarkable list of alumni including Maimonides (12th-century Jewish philosopher), Ibn Khaldun (14th-century historian), and Leo Africanus (16th-century geographer). The madrasa even hosted early modern versions of international scholars such as the Flemish Nicolas Cleynaerts who studied the Qoran there in 1540. It is hardly surprising, then, that in addition to making significant discoveries in humanistic and scientific thought, these men also forwarded cosmopolitan principles of ethics and citizenship that continue to guide our contemporary society. Since its founding, however, al-Qarawiyyin was also a space of male authority, one that perpetuated patriarchal power,



belying its establishment by an educated woman patron. In fact, it was only in the 1950s that a woman scholar, Fatima al-Kabbaj, was admitted to the University of al-Qarawiyyin.<sup>20</sup> Such are the paradoxical legacies of modern universities as environments that simultaneously inspire cosmopolitan learning and action while actively perpetuating existing social inequities.

How then do we get students to excavate the histories, known and unknown, of their own habitus? Their habitus, which includes not only the university as an institution, but also the space of creativity (the studio or the classroom); as not simply the space of knowledge acquisition or ideation, but also that of social and political agency? Such a critical appraisal might require students to see themselves less as “experts-in-training” but rather as thinkers and experimenters engaged in dialogues with fellow citizens in big and small communities. It might warrant a rethinking of the design studio as more than a space of creative expression, but also of political agency. It might require more honest discussion regarding all creative decisions as being shaped by the biases and prejudices of their authors. Critical architectural histories can help students build such narrative imaginations of their creativity as deliberate interventions in a complex web of histories, social patterns, and political action. A recent publication by Hélène Frichot provides a model here.<sup>21</sup> In *How to Make Yourself a Feminist Design Power Tool*, Frichot proposes a feminist methodology for critiquing the surrounding built environment, especially those elements that might seem natural or obvious to the reader. She encourages users of her instruction manual to engage in creatively co-authoring their spaces, thereby exposing the patriarchies embedded in them.<sup>22</sup>

#### TOWARDS A COSMOPOLITAN ARCHITECTURAL CURRICULUM

A gross definition of cosmopolitanism shared by the many philosophers who have spoken and written on the subject might be framed thus: cosmopolitanism refers to the ethical imperative to provide all humans basic rights, dignity, and dialogue. Cosmopolitanism has had a sturdy impact on the humanities and is increasingly being incorporated into undergraduate

curricula, albeit under different titles such as diversity initiatives, ethics courses, requirements for global coverage, and language training. The fields of architecture, landscape, and urban history too have recalibrated themselves along the question of what we owe those who do not share our national, racial, ethnic, or religious affiliations. In the field of design, however, there is still much work to do in terms of critically incorporating humanistic ethics into disciplinary epistemologies. Models of humanitarian design solutions for vulnerable populations suffering from poverty or dispossession as a result of natural disasters (Habitat for Humanity, Architecture for Humanity, Rural Studio, etc.) are still framed within Eurocentric norms of charity—the vulnerable benefitting from the largesse of the privileged and in turn being dependent on or at least beholden to their benefactors. While we would be remiss to diminish the value of a functioning shelter for a family struggling to survive in Alabama or Aceh, we cannot ignore that such models do little to subvert prevailing power structures and might well reinforce them.<sup>23</sup> Cosmopolitanism offers an alternative departure point, one where charity is replaced with dialogue, pity with respectful curiosity, and assimilation to the dominant order with a recognition of difference as meaningful and indeed necessary for a just social system.

To come of age in a time of “perpetual war” is no doubt an ethical burden, but one that might fuel new cosmopolitanisms. It requires that architectural histories—indeed all histories—recognize their complicity in forms of brutalization, oppression, and inequality over time. It demands new forms of design agency from architects built on a deep and engaged humanistic pathos for the other. ■

#### ENDNOTES

1. Architectural historians have struggled with similar questions for some time now and sought to globalize and democratize the discipline by calling attention to the European and North American biases that have shaped it by dismantling the myth of the “master” architect, and by illuminating the racial, gender, and class limitations of the architectural canon. See, for example: Hosagrahar, J. [2002]. “South Asia: Looking Back, Moving Ahead—History and Modernization.” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 61(3): 355-69; Baydar, G. [2004]. “The Cultural Burden of Architecture.” *Journal of Architectural Education* 57(4): 19-27; Gürel, M. Ö. and K. H. Anthony [2006]. “The Canon and the Void: Gender, Race,

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