The Empire of Modernism

ARTH 548A

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Fall 2004

Description

The consolidation and broad international acceptance of Modern Movement in architecture and town planning theory and practice coincided with the final phase of British and European Modernist imperialism, 1919 – 1969. This research and discussion seminar will focus on the ironic spaces enacted by the interaction between Modernist precept and imperial policy. It will concentrate on the British Empire because its colonial system was more complex and comprehensive than those of, for example, France or Holland, since it included semi-independent Dominions, and White Settlers as well as indigenous colonies. Moreover, it particularly continued in operation in educational and professional capacities, through the change to Commonwealth post-1947 and the emergence of both the decolonizing United Nations and differently colonizing United States.

The trajectory will include study of the impact of Modernist thought on, the legitimation of imperialism as well as on urban development in Britain, the Dominions and Colonies. Within that diverse territory of ideas, instruments and actions lurk fundamental questions about authority claims, the affects of technology and modes of representation communication, and about reception. Other factors to be examined are individual agency and institutional networks in contradistinction to governmental and corporate power, and the opportunistic application of ideology and aesthetics.

These questions and factors will be interrogated through investigation of episodes and sites in the respective chronologies of Modernism and imperialism. Among the most significant are the projection (exhibition) of colonialism, public housing campaigns, colonial modernization in West Africa, racial discrimination and Modernist development and fabricating Commonwealth. The specific sites include Casablanca, Chandigah, Hong Kong and Singapore.

Organization

The seminar will be organized around sequences of introductory talks, selected readings and research projects.

Assessment

Evaluation will be determined by contribution to class discussion (20%) and the assessment of specified research tasks(20%) plus a seminar paper (60%).