

02053401

Theory and History of Architecture (2)

BS Architecture Level 2 / Year 4

2026-2027, Fall Semester

Credits: 2

Credit hours: 32

Teaching team: Professor Jacopo BENEDETTI, Professor JIANG Jiawei

Time: 13:30-15:05pm, Wednesday (16 weeks)

Venue: Classroom 310, South Building, Siping Campus

Overview

Theory and History of Architecture (2) is a core course for senior international undergraduate students enrolled in the Architecture and Historic Architecture Preservation and Engineering programs (taught in English) at the College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University. Additionally, it is offered as an elective for senior students majoring in Urban Planning and Landscape Architecture. Complementing Theory and History of Architecture (1)—which focuses on Chinese architectural history—this course offers a comprehensive study of architectural history and building theory. It is designed to provide students with in-depth knowledge of architectural history and theoretical frameworks in practice, while also fostering their humanistic awareness and critical thinking skills.

This course is typically delivered during the first semester of the fourth year in the undergraduate Architecture program. Each teaching week comprises two class hours, with the course spanning 16 weeks, totaling 32 class hours and earning 2 credits. Additionally, students are required to complete extracurricular assignments equivalent to 32 class hours and to take a final examination. Enrolled students should have already completed foundational courses in architectural history, design principles, and architectural design, and should be proficient in reading and comprehending professional literature in English.

Teaching the history of architecture and building theory has long been a cornerstone of professional training for undergraduate students at the Department of Architecture at Tongji University. Since its inception, the course has undergone several phases of reform, evolving from a focus on description of history to an emphasis on concepts and theories, from chronological narratives to thematic organization, and from knowledge acquisition to the development of practical and critical understanding. These pedagogical approaches and methods are not only integrated into the teaching process and objectives but also serve as fundamental criteria for admission to Tongji University's postgraduate programs in Architecture.

Introduction

The course takes up the history and theory of architecture in the West, from antiquity to the present, focusing on the period from Early Modernity (15th century) onward. It is organized around transitions: the slippages between moments, styles, ideas, and conditions in architectural practice and discourse. Five sections structure the course, each divided in turn into one or two teaching units. The units are designed to offer different lenses for reading architectural history and theory, reenacting the breadth of the disciplinary field in both form and content. The first section, "Method," introduces the questions the course is built on—why we study history, why we study theory, and how the discipline is changing. "Operationalizing history" examines two long processes: the *canonization* of the classical language in Early Modern Europe and its *deformation* through building practice—read at the intersection between the *technical* and *symbolic* dimensions of architecture. "Cross-sections" cuts diachronically through two categories: typology and the media of architecture. "Ushering in modernity" turns first to the shifting geographies of architectural culture from the Baroque to the origins of globalization, and then to the century between the height of the Industrial Revolution and the Second World War, read through three modes of engagement with the past: *combination*, *reform*, and *revolution*. "Archaeology of the present" maps the expanded field of postwar practice and discourse, and closes with guest lectures and discussions on some of the questions facing architecture today.

The course follows the architectural history taught at the junior undergraduate level and prepares students for the architectural history and theory course at the postgraduate level.

Objectives

(1) Expand disciplinary knowledge: This course provides students with a comprehensive understanding of architectural achievements across various historical periods. It explores architectural concepts and theories while examining the interplay between architectural evolution and related developments in science, technology, society, and culture. By doing so, the course aims to enrich students' professional knowledge and broaden their disciplinary perspective within the field of architecture.

(2) Enhance professional competence: The course is designed to help students accumulate knowledge and broaden their horizons through the history of construction and building theory. It seeks to cultivate students' ability to appreciate architectural forms, develop their professional competence by integrating rational thinking, social responsibility, and humanistic care, and guide them in understanding the complex relationships between theory and practice. Additionally, the course introduces the multidisciplinary methodologies and skills that have shaped the development of building industry.

(3) Develop critical thinking skills: Emphasizing the exploration of architectural concepts and ideas embedded in historical phenomena, the course encourages students to compare and observe the continuity and changes in historical evolution. This approach aims to enhance students' abilities to discern, analyze, and critically evaluate architectural developments, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the discipline.

(4) Foster cultural awareness: The course integrates the perspective of cultural history into the study of architectural history, emphasizing the customs, beliefs, symbolic meanings, and traditional continuities associated with historical buildings. It seeks to develop students' awareness of architectural cultural diversity while strengthening their cultural self-awareness and confidence in international exchanges.

Methods

1. Class lecture

Lectures serve as the primary mode of instruction. Each session focuses on a specific topic, presented by the course teachers using a combination of visual and textual materials. Interaction with students is encouraged to deepen understanding and engagement with the content.

2. Extracurricular learning and assignments

To extend classroom learning, extracurricular activities are divided into three components:

- **Literature reading:** At the end of each lecture, students are assigned readings selected by the course teachers, some of them accompanied by explanatory notes and images. Through group discussions, Q&A sessions, and writing, students engage in comparative analysis and discussions about historical buildings, figures, and currents, deepening their understanding of the course content. A list of recommended readings is also provided, for students who wish to explore particular topics further.
- **Notebook:** Students are required to upload their lecture notes to a digital notebook, along with further notes, insights, and questions arising from their own study. This format allows for an ongoing exchange with the course teachers, who clarify difficulties, answer questions, and suggest optional case studies tailored to each student's interests.
- **Assignments:** Students are obliged to submit two assignments, whose requirements can be seen in the scoring criteria.

Outcomes

1. **Comprehensive understanding of architectural history:** Students will gain a systematic understanding of the development of architectural history and theory. They will become familiar with the significant architectural achievements across various historical periods, grasp the contextual relationships between these achievements, and master the fundamental methods for analyzing historical figures, architectural schools, and their design philosophies. This knowledge will enhance their professional expertise and capabilities.
2. **Mastery of building theories:** Students will develop a deep understanding of the background, ideological implications, historical roles, and practical applications of various building theories and doctrines. They will learn the essential methods for theoretical inquiry, establish connections with core issues in the architectural discipline, and cultivate a basic understanding of the interdisciplinary approaches in architecture.
3. **Critical awareness and professional responsibility:** Through the study of history and theory, students will establish a historical awareness that strengthens their ability to critically assess architectural developments. They will also develop a professional sense of social responsibility, enabling them to contribute thoughtfully to the field of architecture.
4. **Cultural sensitivity and global perspective:** The course will enhance students' cultural awareness, helping them to appreciate the diversity of architectural cultures across different regions. Students will also build cultural self-awareness and confidence, particularly in the context of global exchanges and interactions.

5. **Development of independent learning and critical thinking:** Students will cultivate the ability to engage in autonomous learning, fostering critical thinking skills that enable them to continuously advance their understanding of current architectural issues through a historical lens.

Teaching framework

SECTION	TEACHING THEME/CONTENT/OBJECTIVE	TEACHING MODE
Section 1 Week 1	Method Unit A: <i>Why history? Why theory?</i> (1 lecture)	Lectures
Section 2 Week 2 to Week 5	Operationalizing history Unit B: <i>Canon and tradition</i> (2 lectures) Unit C: <i>Technical and symbolic</i> (2 lectures)	Lectures
Section 3 Week 6 to Week 7	Cross-sections: types and media Unit D: <i>Private, collective, public, sacred</i> (1 lectures) Unit E: <i>Architectural media</i> (1 lecture)	Lectures
Section 4 Week 8 to Week 11	Ushering in modernity Unit F: <i>Centers and peripheries</i> (2 lectures) Unit G: <i>Combination, reform, revolution</i> (2 lectures)	Lectures
Section 5 Week 12 to Week 15	Archaeology of the present Unit H: <i>In the expanded field</i> (2 lectures) Unit I: <i>Too present to imagine?</i> (2 lectures)	Lectures + Guest lectures
Section 6 Week 16	Final Examination	Exam

Scoring criteria

SCORING ITEM	WEIGHT	SCORING ESSENTIALS
Attendance	10%	Attendance rate and level of participation in class.
Notebook	10%	Timely and consistent upload of notes on lectures and assigned readings, together with questions on the topics of the course.
Assignment 1	15%	Evidence of engagement with lectures and assigned readings (primary material); sources made explicit and properly referenced; clear

		concepts and logical argument. Assignments must be submitted in the form of a short response paper (approx. 1,000–1,500 words).
Assignment 2	15%	Evidence of engagement with lectures, assigned readings, and additional sources of academic quality (primary and extended material); sources made explicit and properly referenced; clear concepts and logical argument. Assignments must be submitted in the form of a short essay (approx. 1,000–1,500 words).
Final examination	50%	Mastery of the material; ability to identify the characteristics of historical forms; ability to connect, compare, and analyze historical phenomena; understanding of theoretical concepts and their implications, and the ability to articulate and synthesize them. Selected topics will be assessed in the final examination.

Teaching calendar

WEEK 1 DATE September 16, 2026 SECTION 1 <i>Method</i> UNIT A Why history? Why theory? THEMATIC FOCUS Broad survey of the discipline; orientation and methodology of the course; structure of lectures and assignments. CONTENTS Why do we study history? Why do we study theory? And, more specifically, why is the course built the way it is—why <i>this</i> history, why <i>this</i> theory? The opening lecture takes up these questions, explaining how the discipline is transforming: the opening to marginalized voices, global histories, postcolonial perspectives, technology- and media-centered approaches, the consequences of the environmental turn, the challenges of collective authorship, and, more broadly, the field’s growing entanglements with other forms of knowledge. The structure of the course is framed as a critical translation of historical material rather than a neutral survey—and, by that token, as a tool for thinking about the present through the past. The lecture explains why the course focuses on transitions rather than periods: on the slippages between moments, styles, ideas, and conditions. It then sets out the structure of the lectures and assignments: a limited number of examples treated in depth, commented readings drawn from various periods and disciplines, the notebook, and the final examination.

WEEKS 2 & 3

DATES

September 23 and September 30, 2026

SECTION 2

Operationalizing history

UNIT B

Canon and tradition

THEMATIC FOCUS

Framing the continuity of the classical language in Western architecture through two parallel processes: its critical *canonization* in Early Modern Europe (humanism), and its plastic *deformation* through the traditional building practices of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

CHRONOLOGICAL SCOPE

The 15th century, reaching back through the Middle Ages to ancient Greece and Rome, then forward to comparable processes of canonization and tradition-making up to the early 20th century.

CONTENTS

The classical language of Western architecture shows an “astounding tenacity” (Gombrich); it is a shadow hard to step out of, one that stretches well into the present and across much of the world. How do we explain its persistence? How are we to understand its cyclical returns—what Ernst Howald called the “rhythmical form” of Western culture? The lectures address these questions through two terms, *canon* and *tradition* (Settis), which open onto the problem of how history is put to work in architectural practice. We tie them to broader distinctions between *history* and *memory* (Nora; Assmann), and between *rule* and *custom*. Our focus is the onset of humanistic culture in 15th-century Italy; the Renaissance gives us a frame for seeing how continuity and discontinuity operate in architectural history. We examine built examples—the temple, the theater, the self-standing arch—alongside written traces of architectural thought, chief among them Vitruvius's *De architectura*. For Early Modern Europe, we take the past not merely as an ideal reference but as a lingering physical presence: a landscape of ruins and infrastructural remains. We follow how these physical traces were first seen as unreachable, then as legible, then as usable (Petrarch; Alberti)—a shift after which the classical was not *reproduced* but *reperformed*. The lectures present the frictions between precedent and practice, arguing that much of Early Modern architecture was an attempt to reconcile the two: the *ideal* against the *experienced*, the *original* against the *transformed*. We close by following the threads of canon and tradition through to the 20th century, seeing how they have been reframed, confirmed, reinforced, or reinvented.

WEEKS 4 & 5

DATES

October 10* and October 14, 2026

SECTION 2

Operationalizing history

UNIT C

Technical and symbolic

THEMATIC FOCUS

Understanding the transformations of architectural language as the interplay between “technical” and “symbolic” systems.

CHRONOLOGICAL SCOPE

The 16th century, reaching back to Greece, Rome, and early humanism, and forward to the Baroque, the Neoclassical, and to late 20th-century postmodernism.

CONTENTS

To explain how historical models were turned into a new architectural language we explore two parallel notions: the *technical* and the *symbolic*. We define the *technical* as the inner making of architecture, the business of its craft: the configuration of structural systems, the sourcing and disposition of materials, the functional arrangement of spaces, the primary operations of composition. The *symbolic* is architecture’s attribution of meaning, whereby a building stands for something beyond itself, or takes on values added to it from outside. We approach the two notions through a specific object: the classical column, and its combination into the architectural orders. Before it served as an ornament, the column was a technical object: a structural element, a proportional system, a means of governing building practice in the absence of codified representational systems. We follow its transformations from the tectonic honesty of the Greek temple to the hybrid construction systems of the Roman theater, from the purism of Leon Battista Alberti to the composite language of the mature Renaissance, watching practitioners shift their attention from the built mass to the void—turning the column, so to speak, from *figure* into *ground* (Rubin). From there we discuss the code of the ancient orders—the doctrine of *decorum*, whereby certain forms suited certain activities in certain spaces—and observe how that code was overwritten, transformed, and expanded in Early Modern architecture. We find other interactions between the technical and symbolic in both architectural practice and representation—above all in the invention of perspective: at once a *scientific theory* of art and a *symbolic form* (Panofsky). We close by tracing parallel dynamics through the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, discussing ideas of ornament and “truth to materials” (*Materialgerechtigkeit*) in modern architecture, and finally postmodernism’s disjointed vocabulary of classical elements rendered as communicational stereotypes. Venturi and Scott Brown’s reading of Las Vegas as a *city of signs* serves as a proxy for contemporary symbolic vernaculars—from the Strip to Chinese copycat culture.

* The lecture scheduled for October 7 (Wednesday) will be moved to October 10 (Saturday)

WEEK 6

DATES

October 21, 2026

SECTION 3

Cross-sections: types and media

UNIT D

Private, collective, public, sacred

THEMATIC FOCUS

Investigating typology as a use-form and as a function of access (private, collective, public, and sacred); focusing on how the same types have changed across history, meaning different things at different times and to different users.

CHRONOLOGICAL SCOPE

From the Middle Ages through the Renaissance and the Enlightenment to the end of the 19th century.

CONTENTS

This lecture opens a new section of the course, one that follows no individual event, conjuncture, or transition but traces processes that unfold across long durations of time (Braudel). The unit's subject is architectural typology. We begin by offering a working definition of typology as *use-form*—that is, the conventional form a given program has taken over a given span of time and in a given geographical region. We then analyze different use-forms through the lens of access, distinguishing between the *private* (accessible only to me and to those close to me), the *collective* (accessible to me and my group), the *public* (accessible to "all"), and the *sacred* (accessible to none, or rather, not accessible to me). The lecture dwells on a selection of typologies read diachronically, in their development over time. We start with the church, both the type that served as architecture's privileged experimental ground until the Enlightenment and its only *synthetic* rather than *serial* space (Frankl). Nolli's plan of Rome (1748) serves us to introduce the public role of churches; a cross-section through history shows how the precedent of the ancient basilica was adapted, modified, and transformed by new ritual practices and patterns of use—turning the church into an *inhabited space* (Carrero), at once a stage for prayer, for theatrical performance, and for civic assembly. From there we examine use-forms of rural retreat and urban dwelling—the aristocratic type, from castle to *palazzo*, a transition we define as a change in degrees of openness (with the Palazzo Ducale in Urbino as the paradigmatic case); and the dense type, from the urban tenement to Sullivan's *tall building*. We then consider the new types introduced with the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, discussing how these were defined against different ideas of collectivity and publicity. We close on the transformation of use-forms within existing buildings—adaptive reuse—reading it as a constant throughout time, and historicizing a practice too readily taken as a hallmark of the present alone.

WEEK 7

DATE

October 28, 2026

SECTION 3

Cross-sections: types and media

UNIT E

Architectural media

THEMATIC FOCUS

Investigating the media of architectural practice and thought; highlighting how different media gain and lose prominence over time, and how they condition the discipline.

CHRONOLOGICAL SCOPE

From classical antiquity to the present, focusing on the 16th-17th and 20th centuries.

CONTENTS

We begin by discussing the role of drawings, writings, and print in the spread of Renaissance classicism. We ask how the success of certain positions was bound to the media through which they were expressed (Serlio; Palladio) and the reach of their editorial diffusion (Pozzo). Looking at a selection of architectural treatises, we consider the resources and the inherent limits of the printed medium (Man). We then set treatises in which

text governs (or substitutes) drawing (Vitruvius; Alberti) against those in which drawing governs text (Palladio; Vignola), examining the rhetorical and visual devices each author employed and their bearing on how the work spread. From there we turn to how changes in representational media reshaped architectural practice, from Borromini and the introduction of graphite drawing tools to the arrival of photography—attending to the extreme cases, where one medium became so prominent as to overshadow the others. The lecture closes with some early insights into the rise of digital media in architectural practice, mapping the discourse around the 1960s and opening onto a topic that becomes central in the final section of the course.

WEEKS 8 & 9

DATES

November 4 and November 11, 2026

SECTION 4

Ushering in modernity

UNIT F

Centers and peripheries

THEMATIC FOCUS

Tracing changes in the cultural, political, and imaginative geographies of architecture, from the Baroque to the origins of globalization.

CHRONOLOGICAL SCOPE

The 17th and 18th centuries, reaching into the first half of the 19th.

CONTENTS

The lectures of this unit take up a different lens for investigating change in architectural culture: geography. Here we set aside the sequential flow of events to take account of simultaneities (Soja), telling history through synchronic panoramas. We frame the rise of the Baroque as both consequence and expression of the fractures in Europe's religious unity, with the architectural, artistic, and urban programs of the Counter-Reformation standing in a deliberate dialectic of excess against the rise of Protestantism. In this light we discuss the scope of the *Roma triumphans* of the 17th century (Bernini, Borromini, Cortona): an attempt at recentering Europe's cultural geography on Rome, reinforcing its identity as the *one city* (urbs) of the West—a territory of the imagination. By the same token we describe the counter-drive: the rise of new *centers* far from the shores of the Mediterranean (Braudel). This conjuncture signals a reorientation of intellectual networks, the redefinition of regional identities, and more broadly the rise of modern political subjects—a transition marked, in architecture, by the defeat of the Roman Baroque (the *old* world's architects) in the competition for Louis XIV's Louvre (the institutional center of the *new*). We set this against the emergence of a new architecture, grounded variously in an a-tectonic play on the Renaissance tradition or in the scientific mentality inaugurated by Galileo and Descartes. We also observe a different engagement with antiquity, whereby the models of the past are decoupled from their actual places, so that motifs and processes of ruination could be applied across the continent to architecture both actual and imagined, and even restaged in Britain's landscape gardens. The rise of the Grand Tour—the travels of the educated youth of the *new* world to the sites of the *old*—is set beside the first systematic surveys of ancient Greek architecture, which prepared a new revival of antiquity in search of the *true origin* of the West (Winckelmann). This polycentric geography is also one that becomes increasingly global, opening to the influence of distant lands through routes of trade, collectorship, and colonialism. The fascination with the *historical other* of antiquity is progressively translated into a fascination

with the *cultural other* of the foreign (Lévi-Strauss). We describe this new, unbounded, horizontal world both as the premise for the bounded identities of the 19th-century nation states and as the stage for the naturalization of culture and the scientificization of history that would ground modern thought.

WEEKS 10 & 11

DATES

November 18 and 25, 2026

SECTION 4

Ushering in modernity

UNIT F

Combination, reform, revolution

THEMATIC FOCUS

Tracing the transition into modern architecture through three lenses: *combination* (eclecticism), *reform* (non-historicist progressive trends), and *revolution* (the Modern Movement); discussing how each relates to history; framing how this transition hardened into a dogma (International Style).

CHRONOLOGICAL SCOPE

The mid-19th to the mid-20th century.

CONTENTS

With these lectures we cover roughly a century, from the height of the Industrial Revolution to the Second World War. We begin by surveying the effects of industrialization—a transformation that reached deep into the social fabric of the West and its built environment. Major cities were changed in kind and in quantity, at least doubling their populations (London; Paris), and turning into "formless masses, jumbles of houses" (Considéran). The achievements of the *machine age* also changed the way architecture was built, and then the way it was thought. Society grew preoccupied with time—not the time of a distant past but that of the present and the future—making *innovation* and *progress* into cultural imperatives. The canon of the classical and the tradition of its many revivals, with their codified forms and practices, faltered and left a vacuum. All this while the entangled processes of geographical expansion and multiplied centrality introduced in the previous unit—the unbounded, horizontal world of globalization—came to fruition. Culture, art, and architecture underwent a rapid and profound transformation of their own. To describe architecture's transitions across this period, we introduce three notions corresponding to three forms of engagement with history: *combination*, *reform*, and *revolution*. The first, *combination*, describes the architecture of eclecticism, developed and practiced in the academies, where vast (horizontal) repertoires of the most disparate chronological and geographical origin are grafted into new formal assemblages. We trace this approach to the empirical rationalism and encyclopedic ideals of the Enlightenment, and show how historical models came to be reduced to compositional alternatives, deployed for modern functional programs—and, more broadly, as rhetorical devices for the construction of new national identities. By *reform* we mean those progressive trends that rejected historicism, finding their footing in the revival of craftsmanship, in the aesthetic celebration of technology, in the geometries of nature, in material expression, or in imported *exotic* motifs. The imaginative buildings that resulted anticipated much of what would follow: an overt use of industrial materials—concrete, steel, and glass—and a social progressivism that called for an art "dans tout et pour tous" (in everything and for everyone). Finally, with *revolution* we refer to more radical ruptures with history, from certain examples of Expressionism to the Modern Movement. We focus on the latter, a movement that for all its perceived

consistency was inherently pluralistic: from the stereotomic formalism of the French to the tectonic structuralism of the Germans (Lash), from the insistence on social concerns and public demands of some to others' focus on the qualities of domestic life (Rowe), from the pseudo-scientific and analytical to the imaginative (van Eyck). We attend to key works of the *heroes* of the Modern Movement, read through the words of its manifestos and the pages of some of its *mythographers*, tracing how this revolutionary current of renewal came to be dogmatized into the one “indispensable” style of the globalized present. We close on a building that falls outside our chronological scope but that, in its design and its reception, opens a first crack in the *dogma* and prefigures themes that would shape the second half of the 20th century: Le Corbusier's Notre-Dame-du-Haut at Ronchamp (1955).

WEEKS 12 & 13

DATE

December 2 and 9, 2026

SECTION 5

Archaeology of the present

UNIT H

In the expanded field

THEMATIC FOCUS

Mapping the “expanded field” of postwar architectural discourse and practice through a series of fault lines and dichotomies.

CHRONOLOGICAL SCOPE

The second half of the 20th century, reaching back to find the same processes at work in earlier moments.

CONTENTS

In this unit, we look at postwar architecture through a series of positions and dichotomies, read as the opposing ends of a complex spectrum of interference. The aim is to map why and how the course of modern architecture broke into smaller currents, running at different speeds, along diverging trajectories, and crossing at frantic junctions. The complexity of our map results from the profound transformations—cultural, social, economic, and technological—that occurred throughout the West in the second half of the century: a short span, but by no means an uneventful one, moving as it did from the years of postwar reconstruction to the energy crisis and the exhaustion of the boom economies, from the rise of mass media to that of pop culture, from the emergence of digital technology and environmental concerns to alternating pushes toward global entanglement and regionalization. All of this unfolded against a redefinition of the subject of architectural practice and thought: a society growing in both scale and needs—the *greater number* (Milan Triennale). We begin by reflecting, once again, on the relationship between architectural practice and history. To this end, we trace how the *modern* itself became *historical*, and how that historicization raised the possibility—perhaps even the necessity—of its reform, allowing architecture to once again “shake hands with the past” (van Eyck) by distancing itself from the rhetorical positions of early modernism. This new engagement with history opened onto alternative directions: from the *realism* of Team 10 to the abstracted classicism of the Italian postmodernists, from the American blend of historical and pop referencing to the fascination with the *timeless* of later, radical forms of architectural traditionalism. We move on to how architecture's concern with broader social questions reoriented the priorities of some toward community, participation, ordinariness, and informality—moving, so to speak, from Giedion's *space, time, architecture* to *place, moment, architecture*.

(Smithson). The reach of these questions compelled practitioners and intellectuals alike to confront disciplines lying beyond the conventional boundaries of architecture, in search of a language that could be spoken by *many*: sociology, anthropology, psychology, information theory, performance art. These directions converged with a renewed interest in the primitive and the vernacular—a subterranean current in prewar modernity that became manifest in the latter half of the century—and, in turn, with a renewed interest in the material culture of craftsmanship. We discuss the implications of these returns to origins, cast variously as *nostalgia* or as a means of *liberating the present* (Highmore). We then see how, for all the emphasis some placed on architecture's multiple entanglements—with society, with place, with craft—other currents asserted its disciplinary autonomy, engaging in rarefied exercises of formal and intellectual self-reflexivity. Such instances (foregrounding the *processes of form*) stand opposed to those that investigated the *forms of process*: the ways architecture can result from incremental, accumulative, methodical combinations of simple units. This *culture of connection* (Sadler) tied in with the intellectual and ideological programs of cybernetics and ecology, and developed into a wide array of experiments: from the cell-based urbanism of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s to the burgeoning field of infrastructure studies, from Design Methods to the utopias of European radical architecture, Japanese Metabolism, and the American counterculture. We close on globalization, tracing Western architecture's interest in the *periphery* of the First World, seen not as a "recipient" but as an "active generator of architectural theory and practice" (Giamarelos)—paving the way, so to speak, to some of the most pressing questions of the new century.

WEEKS 14 & 15

DATES

December 16 and 23, 2026

SECTION 5

Archaeology of the present

UNIT H

Too present to imagine?

THEMATIC FOCUS

Surveying contemporary discourse and practice.

CHRONOLOGICAL SCOPE

The 21st century.

CONTENTS *

The final unit of the course focuses on the *immediate history* of the present (Lacouture). We set out to investigate why our time might be said to stand apart from the past, and conversely how contemporary practice and discourse can be reframed within broader historical patterns—coming full circle to the questions posed in the opening lecture. The unit is structured through guest lectures and extended discussions, in which students are asked to take active part, drawing on what they have learned across the course. We begin by asking what methodological tools can help us find our footing when the object of analysis is not a finished event but an ongoing practice. In response, the first lecture introduces the intellectual discipline, the operations, and the media of architectural criticism, offering a glimpse of what it means to think and write about architecture "from within." In the second lecture we turn how globalization continues to transform design culture, professional work, and construction practice—looking into the intricate reality of transcultural

networks, regional entanglements, capital flows, and layered exchanges of knowledge, from the Global North to the Global South, but also, and more interestingly, from East to West and from South to South.

* The detailed topics of these lectures will be finalized in the early weeks of the semester and shared with students.

WEEK 16

DATE

December 30, 2026

SECTION 5

Final examination

Bibliography

The list below is indicative. Assigned readings will be given week by week, at the end of each lecture.

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