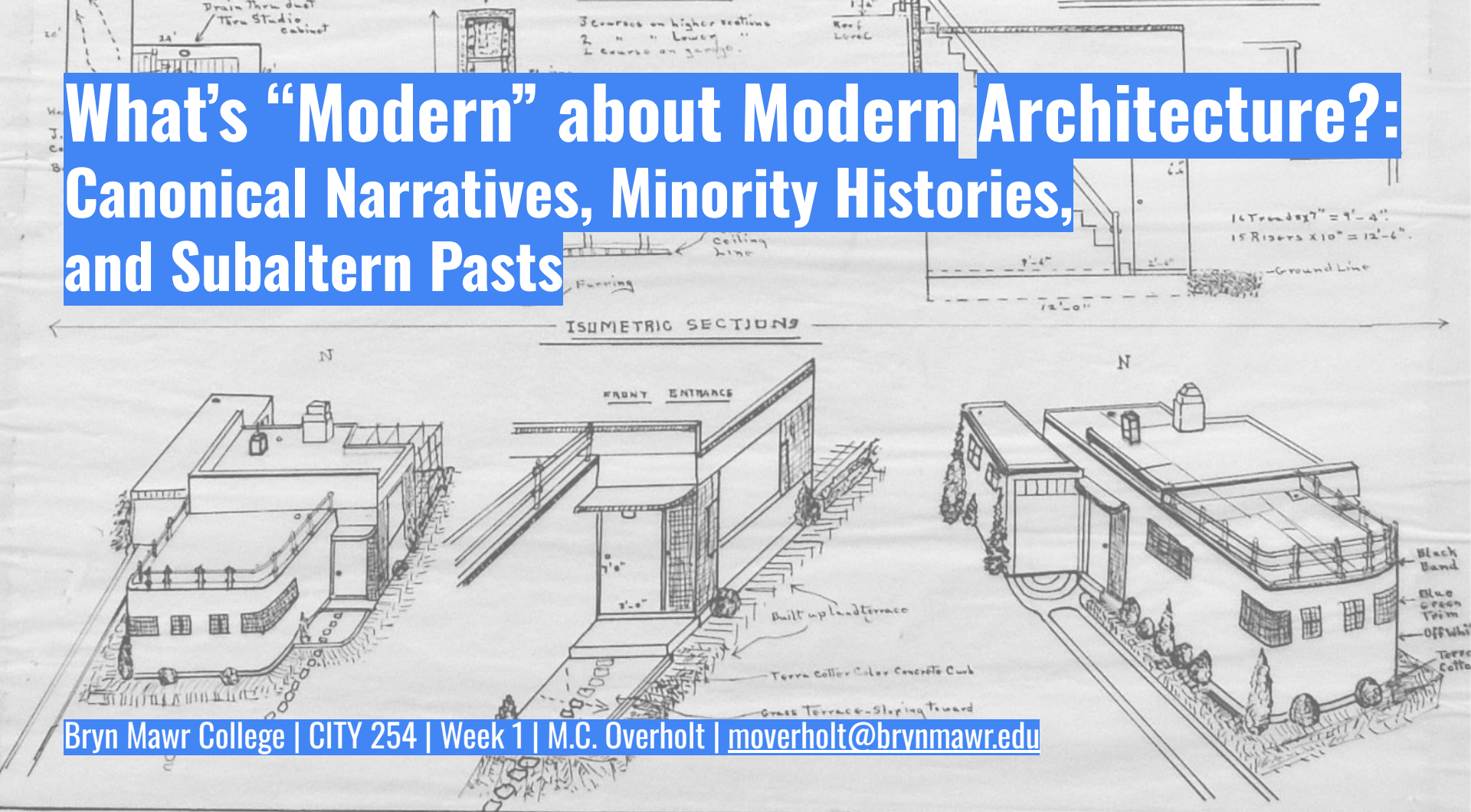


What's "Modern" about Modern Architecture?: Canonical Narratives, Minority Histories, and Subaltern Pasts



Introductions

What's *modern* about modern architecture?

Syllabus Review

Honor Code / Academic Integrity

I regard plagiarism as a very serious matter. In this class, plagiarism consists of work taken partially or entirely from an uncited source (online content, a peer, a published article, etc.) and assumed as your own. If I have reasons to suspect plagiarizing, I will ask that you report yourself to the Bryn Mawr Honor Board. See the [Bryn Mawr Honor Code and Honor Board Hearing Process](#) in the Student Handbook for more information.

Accommodations for Disabilities

Bryn Mawr College is committed to providing equal access to students with a documented disability. Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Access Services. Students can email **accessservices@brynmawr.edu** to make an appointment with the Access Services office to begin this confidential process. Once registered, students should schedule an appointment with me, the instructor, as early in the semester as possible to share the verification form and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations for disabilities are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement. Any student who has a disability-related need to tape record this class must first speak with the Access Services office and to me, the instructor.

Attendance

- Attendance at lectures is required
- Students may miss two classes without penalty
- additional absences may affect the participation portion of the final grade
- Participation also includes active listening and engagement in in-class discussion and activities
- Consistent lateness will also lead to a conversation between myself and the student; if not adequately addressed, this will also negatively affect the class participation and attendance grade

Assignments

- **Syllabus Quiz (Week 1): Due next Monday, Sept. 7 by 11:59pm EST**
- Weekly Readings
- Group Class Presentation: **Sign-up due next Monday, Sept. 7 by 11:59pm EST**
- Midterm and Final Exams
- Writing Assignment: "History in the Present"

WEEK 2

Living on American Land: Settler Colonization, Indigenous Resistance, and Plantation Architectures

September 8 & 10

This week we will explore the effects of settler colonization and the global slave trade on the built and natural landscapes of the Americas. We will look at the architectural traditions and technological and cultural achievements of several indigenous groups, while also historicizing colonial attempts at indigenous erasure. Architectural style itself was employed as a tool of colonial erasure, and colonial architectural construction sites became sites of enforced labor—both for indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans. Following the arrival of enslaved peoples in North America in 1619, we will consider the development of plantation architecture as well as the early civic architecture of the United States, which itself expressed the young nation's conflicting commitments to democracy and slavery. Enslaved Africans played a significant role in building the US's architectural landmarks, as did indigenous master builders in Spanish colonial Latin America (enter the first hybrid style in the course: "tequitqui" art and architecture).

Assignment due: Syllabus Quiz

Required Reading:

Monday, September 8

- Kathleen James-Chakraborty, "Living on the North American Land," in *Architecture since 1400* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 191-207.
- Susan Verdi Webster, "Masters of the Trade: Native Artisans, Guilds, and the Construction of Colonial Quito," *JSAH* 68, no. 1 (Mar. 2009), 10–29 (Focus on pages 10-12 and 20-26; you may skim or skip the other sections if you're short on time.)

Wednesday, September 10

- Mabel O. Wilson, "Notes on the Virginia Capitol: Nation, Race, and Slavery in Jefferson's America," in *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present*, edited by Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis, and Mabel O. Wilson (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020): 23-42.
- Jola Idowu, "Tapia, Tabbi, Tabique, Tabby," *Places Journal* (September 2024).

Key Projects:

- Thomas Jefferson and Charles-Louis Clérissieu, Virginia State Capitol, Richmond, 1785–1788.
- William Thornton, United States Capitol, Washington, DC, 1793–1800 [other parts of capitol completed later, like the Rotunda by Benjamin Harry Latrobe and Charles Bulfinch]
- Acoma Pueblo, New Mexico, 13th c.–
- Mission San Gabriel Arcángel, Los Angeles, CA, 1771–1805
- Templo Mayor, Tenochtitlan (current day Mexico City), c. 1325–1521
- Zócalo and the Mexico City Metropolitan Cathedral (Catedral Metropolitana de la Asunción de la Bienaventurada Virgen María a los cielos), 1573–1813
- Francisco Tipán, altars at Churches of La Compañía (1649–95) and San Francisco, (1697–99), Quito

Student Case Study:

- Tabby cabins built by (and for) enslaved people, Kingsley Plantation, Fort George Island, Florida, c. 1810s–1830s (Reference: Jola Idowu, "Tapia, Tabbi, Tabique, Tabby"

If there is an assignment due, it will be noted on the syllabus (along with the due date). The assignment due date is also visible in Moodle.

Reading should be completed before arriving to lecture. Knowledge of required readings will be tested in your midterm and final exam. All readings can be accessed on Moodle. Some readings are optional, pay attention!

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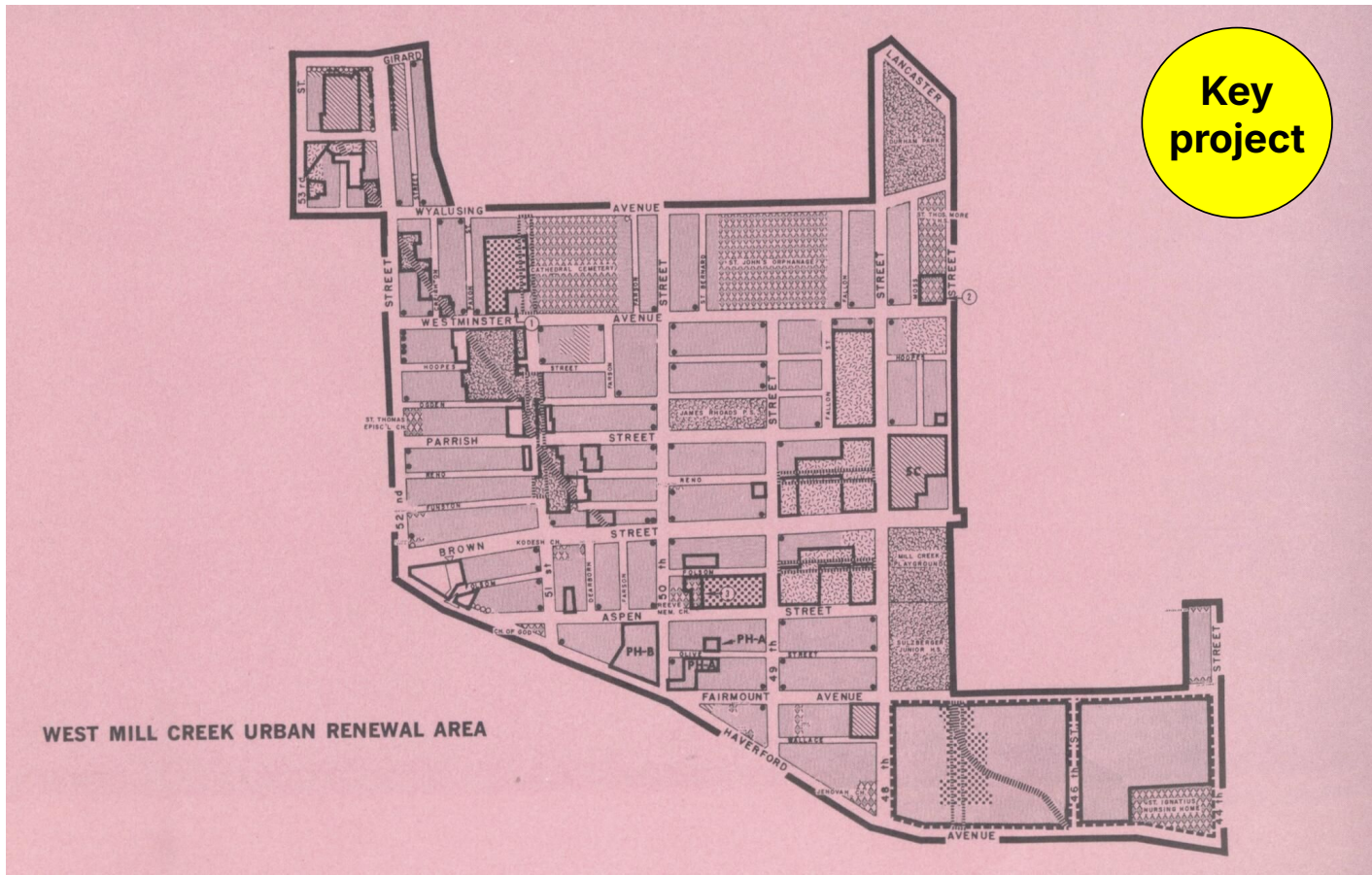
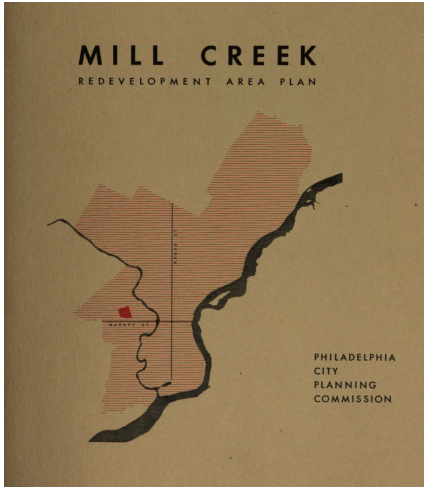
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You will only be tested on the “key projects” listed in the syllabus and presented in weekly lectures. Memorization of dates and architects is not required.

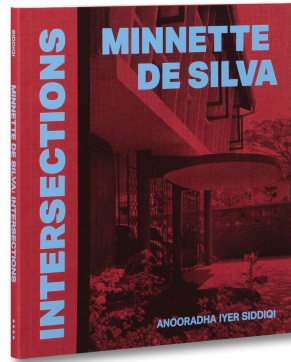
Every student will join a team to present on one week’s “student case study”



Louis Kahn, Mill Creek Redevelopment Area Plan and Mill Creek Homes, 1948–55

Readings

- All readings on Moodle except Anooradha Siddiqi's book *Minnette de Silva: Intersections* (2024), available as an ebook online
- Some readings are listed as "optional" on the syllabus. These are very helpful for exam preparation, but not required.



Assignments

- **Group Class Presentation**

Students will divide into even groups of 4–5 to investigate different “student case studies.” Each group will present one case study (listed on the syllabus as “student case study”) and connect it to the corresponding (optional) course reading. Presentations will last around 10 minutes and will be submitted to the professor for review **at least three days before the presentation** (i.e. if you are presenting on a Tuesday, you should turn the slides in by the Saturday morning prior; if you are doing a presentation on a Thursday, you can turn it in by the Monday morning prior)

****sign-up for this in Moodle (Under “Group Presentations” section)**

Due next Monday, Sept. 7 by 11:59pm EST

****note the presentation template available on Moodle**

Assignments

- **Midterm and Final Exams**

The midterm exam will ask students to answer two short answer questions (2–3 paragraphs each).

The final exam will ask one short answer and one long answer question (5 paragraphs).

Knowledge of the key projects, required readings, and broader course themes will be tested. Students will be provided with a group of possible exam questions a week in advance, so they will have time to prepare. Exams can be taken in person (during class) or on Moodle. The midterm exam will test weeks 1–5, and the final exam weeks 6–13.

Assignments

- **Writing in the Present**

Inspired by the concept of “archival ferment” and recent approaches to architectural history such as [PLATFORM](#), students will write a short think piece (5–7 pages, double-spaced) highlighting a building or case study from architectural history and exploring how it might illuminate, complicate, or speak to a contemporary issue.

Part I. Journal Entry

Part II. Bibliography

Part III. Short essay / “think piece”

PLATFORM

Provocative. Timely. Diverse.



Jul 28

**After Maghreb: The Spatial
Politics of Grief in Wartime
Tehran**

**Add/drop deadline is in one week:
Thursday, September 10, 2026, 11:59pm EST**



Esra Akcan

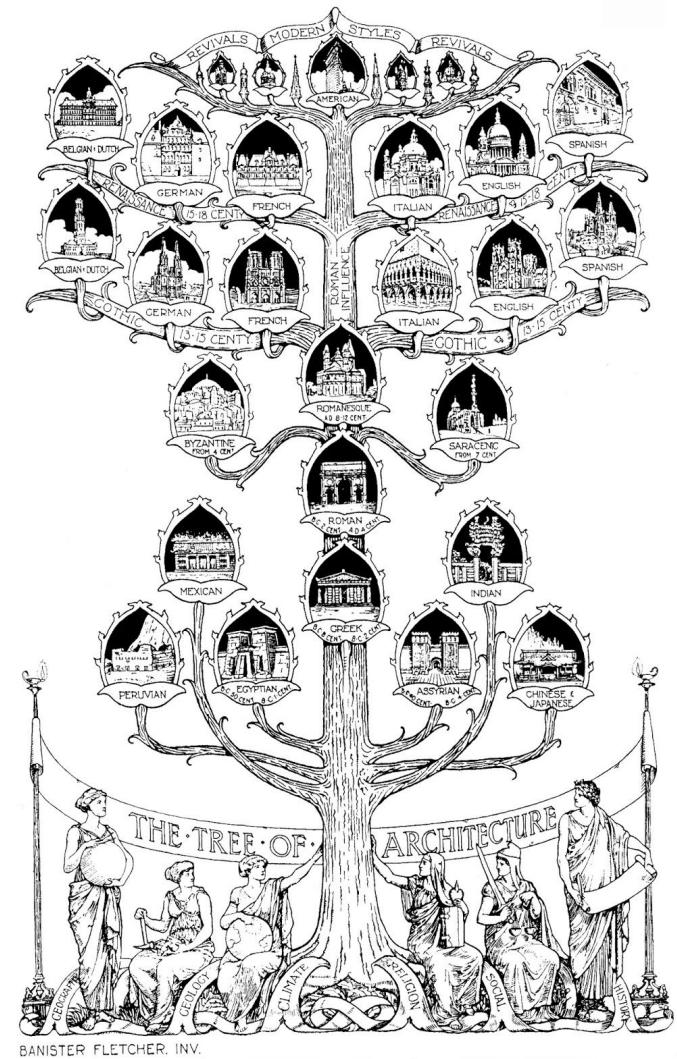
- Architectural historian
- Focus on modern and contemporary architecture and urbanism that foregrounds the intertwined histories of Europe, West Asia, and Northeast Africa
- Rooted in postcolonial theory, she offers “translation” as one way to understanding how modern residential architecture moved and changed in different geographical contexts (for instance, between Germany and Turkey from the 1920s through ‘50s)



The umbrella term “**postcolonial**” refers to:

- The historical phenomena of decolonization and the establishment of postcolonial nation states in the formerly colonized world (concentrated in the 1950s–70s)
- A set of related theories (emerging in the same period, though formalized in academia in the 1980s & ‘90s) that offer new ways of understanding “Non-Western” contexts outside of a Western imperialist frame

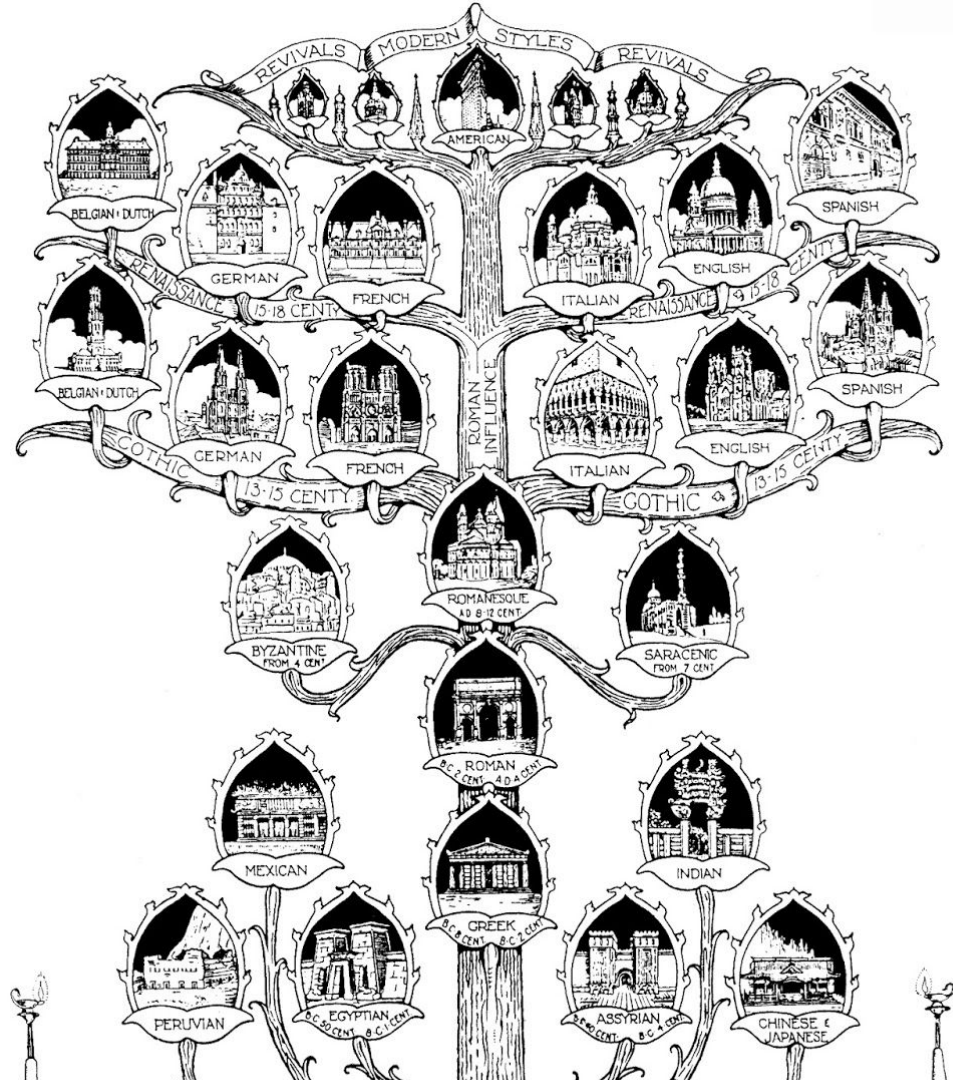
Banister Fletcher, "Tree of Architecture"
from *A History of Architecture*, 1896



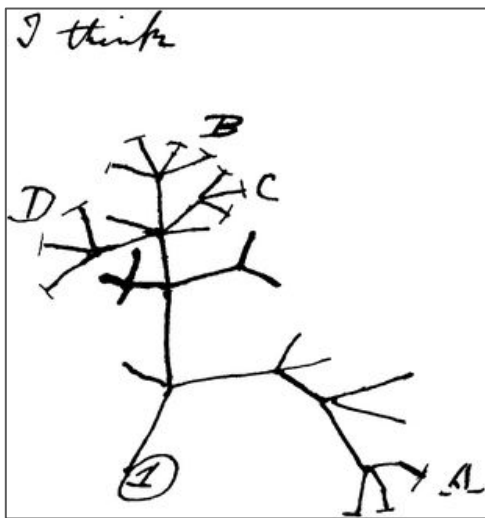
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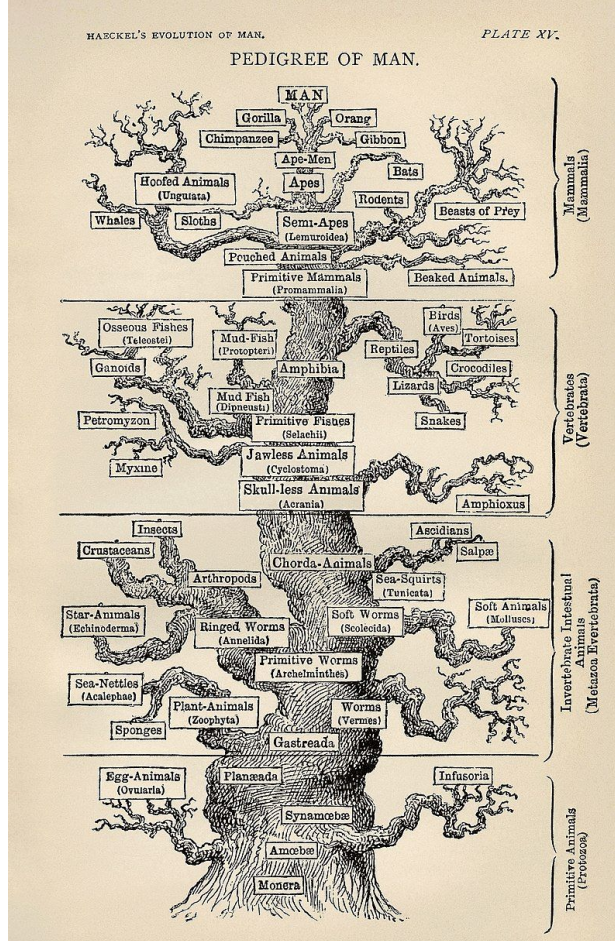
What is this tree saying about the
"development" of "modern"
architecture globally?
Where is modern architecture?



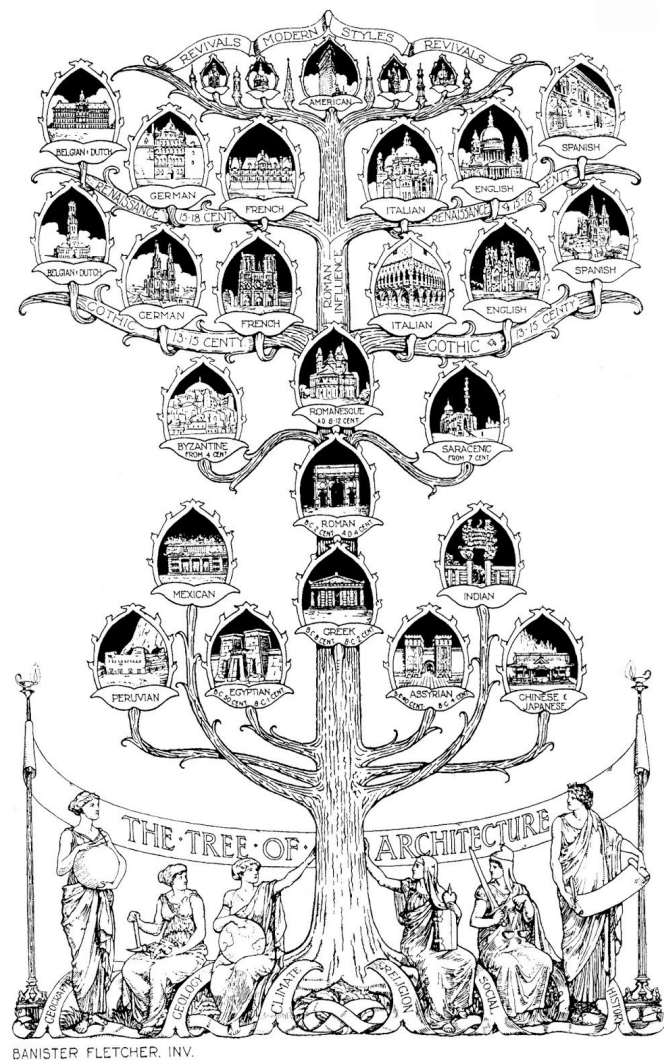
Banister Fletcher, "Tree of Architecture"
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Charles Darwin, sketch of evolutionary tree, 1837



The tree of life as seen by Haeckel in *The Evolution of Man* (1879)





Akcan cites Immanuel Wallerstein's five main reasons the social sciences (and humanities) have been Eurocentric:

1. **Historiography:** “the premise that European supremacy in the history of the world in the last two centuries was something to be ‘proud of.’”
2. **Universalism:** the claim that “whatever happened to Europe ‘represented a repeatable pattern that was applicable everywhere.’”
3. **Civilization:** “The belief that modern Europe was civilized” which “justified the interest in *colonial* conquests to ‘redeem’ non-European people.”
4. **Orientalism:** The scholarly/representational distortion of non-Western cultures
5. **Progress:** The notion that “progress” and advancement was the “underlying explanation of the history of the world.”



How does Akcan differentiate between “**post-structuralist postcolonial theory**” (pdf page 14) and “**humanist postcolonial theory**” (pdf page 22)?

What implications does each body of thought have for interpreting global histories of architecture?

Bonus: Which approach does Akcan prefer? Which do you?



How does Dipesh Chakrabarty differentiate between “minority histories” and “subaltern pasts?”

How might this distinction change how we study and write about histories of marginalized architects, buildings, and communities?



See you next Tuesday!

Required Readings:

- "José Vasconcelos inaugurates in Mexico City the headquarters of the Secretaría de Educación Pública," in *Modern Architecture in Latin America*
- "Flávio de Carvalho, 'City of the Naked Man'," (1930) in *Modern Architecture in Latin America*

Syllabus quiz & group presentation sign-ups on Moodle, BOTH due Monday, September 7 at 11:59pm

***IF YOU AREN'T ENROLLED, COME CHAT!**