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Renegotiating the Boundaries of Architectural History (Keynote I)

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Abstract

Architecture remains one of the most potent symbols of western civilization and culture. In terms of architectural history this has led to the establishing of canonical histories and narratives that privilege western traditions of thinking. There is no doubt, however, that over recent years architectural history and its historiography have been transformed as fields of academic enquiry. The frameworks, subjects and objects, themes and methods of the discipline have expanded beyond its traditional boundaries. This dynamic interaction with other disciplines continues to produce fresh perspectives and conceptual groundings for how we think about architecture and formulate its histories.

In this paper I aim to renegotiate of the boundaries of architectural history; to critically engage with past and present histories and disclose latent assumptions about 'east' and 'west' through the biases and absences in the writing of architectural and cultural histories. This work has developed from my recent engagements with architectural history and its historiography across a broad territory including the Middle East and China. Together, these combine to produce an archive of systems of regulation and resistance in a colonial and postcolonial context that help us understand the dynamics of flow across geographical and intellectual regions. Of particular interest here is the study of architecture produced in 'distant' and 'different' geographies that have been put under the totalising rubric of the 'non-west'. The ambivalence I seek to interrogate lies as much in the intellectual as in the historiographical geographies of the discipline, and it is here that the notions of transculturation and decolonialisation come to the fore as a means of repositioning the west within these.

Biographical Information

Dana Arnold is Professor of Art History at the University of East Anglia, UK. Her research focuses on the ways in which cultural theory informs our understanding of urban space and spatiality and more broadly the historiographical nuances of architectural history. This work has taken on a global dimension with research projects on the architectural dialogues between London and Paris, and those between Britain and China, and Europe and the Middle East.

Professor Arnold's interest in how architecture, space and cities combine is explored in her three books on London, the most recent of which is *The Spaces of the Hospital: Spatiality and urban change in London 1680-1820* (2013). Her work on architectural historiography and theory includes *Reading Architectural History* (2002) and the edited volumes: *Biographies and Space* (2007) and *Rethinking Architectural Historiography* (2006), which was shortlisted for the Nikolaus Pevsner Prize.

She has held research fellowships at The Getty Research Institute, Yale University and the University of Cambridge. She is Guest Professor, International Research Centre for Chinese Cultural Heritage Conservation, Tianjin University, China and has held an Honorary Professorship in the Faculty of Architecture at the Middle East Technical University, Ankara.

Website for the 2016 Conference: http://www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/global_regionalism