



Ardeth

A magazine on the power of the project

9 | 2021

Race

RACE. Exploring the Modern-Colonial Legacy in Contemporary Architecture

Felipe Hernández



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ardeth/2605>

ISSN: 2611-934X

Translation(s):

RACE. Esplorare l'eredità coloniale moderna nell'architettura contemporanea - URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/ardeth/2609> [it]

Publisher

Rosenberg & Sellier

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 December 2021

Number of pages: 23-25

ISSN: 2532-6457

Electronic reference

Felipe Hernández, "RACE. Exploring the Modern-Colonial Legacy in Contemporary Architecture", *Ardeth* [Online], 9 | 2021, Online since 01 December 2022, connection on 09 January 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ardeth/2605>



Creative Commons - Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International - CC BY-NC-ND 4.0
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

RACE.
Exploring the
Modern-Colonial Legacy
in Contemporary
Architecture

Esplorare l'eredità
coloniale moderna
nell'architettura
contemporanea

Editorial

Felipe Hernández

Architecture is an inward looking discipline. Its history conveys the norms of the discipline to an audience composed mostly of architects, who are familiar with the work of their predecessors – from whom they learnt, or for whom they worked. As such, architecture singularises the multiple processes through which space is produced, excluding difference in the pursuit of coherent narratives to sustain its authority, and does so mainly through the figure of the architect. For a long time now, critics like Beatriz Colomina, Diana Agrest, Mary McLeod, Jane Rendell (to mention only a few) have shown how that figure is principally male. However, little has been said about the fact that the figure of the architect is also white; a racial classification that refers not only to epidermal characteristics, but to their national origin, education, and in most cases their class affiliation.

The history of architecture in general, and modern architecture in particular, is constructed on a very narrow basis: a handful of European and North American architects whose work influenced others around the world generating an international movement. As such, there is an apparently clear origin that

Affiliation:
University of
Cambridge

Contacts:
fh285 [at] cam [dot]
ac [dot] uk

DOI:
10.17454/ARDETH09.02

ARDETH #09

also establishes a hierarchy and has a colour of skin. Contributions by African Americans in the United States of America, Afro-descendants in South America, Aborigines in Australia, have not been registered in the architectural history book with the same prominence, as revealed in the recent volume *Race and Modern Architecture. A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present*, wonderfully edited by Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II and Mabel O. Wilson.

Recent books, especially in the United States of America, are beginning to explore the significant contribution of Black architects to the construction of modern cities in their country. The impact of these studies is enormous, even though the focus remains on “blackness”, reducing the complexity of race as a socio-cultural signifier to one group. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary amply to explore the concept of race, so as to include other terms that have been deployed as, or along with race in recent years, for example Arab, Indigenous, Jewish, or Eastern European. It is equally important to explore other contexts where race continues to play an enormously divisive role, like in Europe, as well as well as the implications of race in countries like China, Japan or Indonesia to mention only a few.

The recent announcement that, for the first time in its 173-year history, the RIBA Gold Medal was awarded to an African-born British architect, Sir David Adjaye, was met with celebration. But it also drew attention to the fact that the number of black registered architects in the United Kingdom has dropped to 1%, while in the USA, only 2% of all registered architects are African-Americans, and of those only 0.3% are women.

Similar statistics are found in countries with large Afro-descendant populations like Brazil or Colombia, and even South Africa where only 65 women were registered as architects in 2017. These figures demonstrated the lack of diversity in architectural practice, and urgent need to review access to the profession. And while these statistics refer to the absence of black architects, little is known about Indigenous Australians, Aymara in Bolivia, or First Nations Peoples in Canada, and their contribution to architecture.

As such this issue of *Ardeth* intends to expand discussions about race in architecture, intersecting a broad range of ethno-racial groups, while simultaneously displacing the debate to include regions where it needs more and urgent attention, like in Europe and Latin America, as well as in countries like China and Japan. Thus, for this issue, we seek articles that explore diversity in the profession as well as in education. We also invite papers that embrace multiple methodological agendas to study the contribution of ethnic minority architects around the world, and articulate the potential inherent in the notion of non-white architectures in an attempt to decolonise the discipline.

Authors can use race as a lens to explore a broad range of issues including, but not limited to:

- Expand the narrow margins of current debates about race in architecture.
- Explore the intersections between race, ethnicity, class and gender in contemporary architectural practice.
- Explore the impact of these intersections in the materialization of cities and architectures around the world.
- Explore the contemporary geography of the profession, engaging academic and first-hand experiences by professionals.
- Revisit the history of the profession in specific regions of the world, providing architectural grounds for a more inclusive debate.
- Investigate the extent to which architectural education perpetuates colonial principles therefore reinforcing ethno-racial boundaries in the so-called non-West.
- Examine critically the construction of inherent 'classes', from technologies to forms, related to instrumental use of the locale, as well as national and indigenous styles of work and construction.
- Investigate the possibilities for the existence of non-white architectures through the study of specific buildings.

L'architettura è una disciplina che guarda a se stessa. La storia dell'architettura trasmette le norme della disciplina a un pubblico fatto soprattutto di architetti, che devono conoscere il lavoro dei loro predecessori – dai quali hanno imparato, o per i quali hanno lavorato. In questo modo, l'architettura rende singoli i processi multipli attraverso i quali lo spazio viene prodotto, eliminando le differenze alla ricerca di narrazioni coerenti che possano sostenere l'autorità della disciplina – e lo fa, soprattutto, attraverso la figura dell'architetto-autore. Da tempo ormai autrici come Beatriz Colomina, Diana Agrest, Mary McLeod e Jane Rendell (per nominarne solo alcune) hanno mostrato che questa figura è, di norma, maschile. Tuttavia, ancora poco è stato detto rispetto al fatto che questa figura è anche bianca; una classificazione razziale che si riferisce non solo a caratteri epidermici, ma anche all'origine geografica, al tipo di educazione ricevuta, e nella maggior parte dei casi alla classe sociale di appartenenza. La storia dell'architettura in generale, e dell'architettura moderna in particolare, è costruita su un orizzonte di riferimento ristretto: una manciata di architetti europei e nordamericani il cui lavoro ha influenzato altri e generato un movimento internazionale. In questo senso, c'è un'origine chiara che definisce una specifica gerarchia ed è connotata da uno specifico colore della pelle. I contributi degli afroamericani negli Stati Uniti d'America, degli afrodiscendenti in America Latina, degli australiani aborigeni, non sono stati registrati nelle storie dell'architettura moderna con la stessa forza, come rivela il recente *Race and Modern Architecture. A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present*, curato magistralmente da Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II e