How has racial thinking inflected modern architectural theory and practice? How was race invoked in the production of buildings, cities, villages, and gardens in the context of nationalism, colonialism, settler-colonialism, and postcolonialism? The seminar will explore this question beginning with Quatremère de Quincy’s theory of “character” at the end of the 18th century, through the consideration of taste, education, and civilizational aptitude in discourses on freedom in the Americas, to debates about modern architecture in the twentieth century. Central to this enquiry is the relationship between the body and the environment, with architectural form functioning both as an aesthetic reflection of assumed internal characteristics of racial types, determined also by climate and geography, as well as an “habitat” for the mediation between bodies and environments, thus bearing the biopolitical potential of racial “improvement,” or eugenics. We will critically explore the interrelation of expressive form, physiognomy, physical health, and moral behavior in architectural discourse, and the ways it was used to justify or critique racial violence and inequality in architectural production.

Required Textbooks


Assessments

Weekly responses, participation, and final paper.