At a time of devastating conflict and uncertainty in the Middle East and the Arab World in general, it can seem futile to focus on the evolution of its cities, past and present. And yet, it is precisely because of such violence, that it seems also urgent to turn to the region’s history, mining its cities’ rich past and complex present to enable the projection of possible, diverse and progressive futures.

In the past decade alone, the MENA (Middle East North Africa) region has fostered a wide array of radical experiments in architecture and urbanism. From leading the wave of ‘instant urbanism’ to building the first zero carbon city, MENA cities have also witnessed a resurgence of new social housing and institutional buildings, led major reconstruction and preservation efforts as well as re-affirmed for the world the importance of public space through its recent (albeit now repressed) democratic revolutions.

Moving beyond the contemporary production of wildly broadcast ‘iconic’ projects, this seminar will contrast the region’s emerging and struggling cities while also situating the work within a long history of complex exchanges regionally as well as between East and West. Working through specific discursive ‘lenses’ - accompanied by architectural and urban case studies and focusing in particular on issues of Representation, Post World War II Developmental Strategies, Pan Arabism and Environmental Orientalism - we will build a repertoire of references through which to apprehend the present transformations, as well as inspire other possible trajectories.

While focused specifically on production in the Arab World, the seminar will attempt to both learn from local specificities and move beyond them, considering the issues apprehended, from questions of representation to the challenges posed by globalization, as presenting a wealth of critical opportunities to learn from and point to alternate possibilities, not only for the region’s cities but also for our increasingly urbanized world.

**Structure and Assignments**
The seminar is structured around 8 ‘lenses,’ with each class focused on a specific frame through which to read a particular aspect of the region’s development. The topics are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, and comparative analysis between cities within and beyond the region, as well as at different times will be critical to the discussions. Students are expected to be quite familiar with all of the readings and each student will present at least one reading during the semester. A number of classes will host a guest speaker, whose thinking and work will further enrich the class’s discussion.
For the Final Assignment, students are asked to choose three variables: a city, a time and a ‘lens’ and propose a new representation for the city of their choice. The assignment should be a combination of architectural drawings, diagrams and text – with the ratio of drawing to writing dependent on the individual student’s interest and skill. The Final Assignment will be split into two parts: two oral research presentations outlining topic and approach followed by a Final ‘illustrated paper’. Students’ research and various representation investigations will build towards an exhibition and the publication of a book.

Schedule

Week 1: Introduction
9/9


Other References

Week 2: Representation
9/16
Guest: Yasser Elsheshtawy (tbc via Skype)


**Other References**


**Week 3: The Arab-Islamic City?**

9/23

*Preliminary Research Presentations*

Stefano Bianca, *Urban Form in the Arab World, Past and Present* (UK: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2000), Chapter 2


André Raymond, “Islamic City, Arab City: Orientalist Myths and Recent Views,” in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 21:1, (Taylor & Francis, Ltd. 1994), 3-18

**Other References**

Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 100-119; 133-142


*No class on 9/30*

**Week 4: Colonialism**

10/7

*Preliminary Research Presentations*


Other References


**Week 5: Modernism / Urban Scale**

10/14

*Guest: June Williamson (tbc)*


Mercedes Volait, “Town Planning Schemes for Cairo Conceived by Egyptian Planners in the “Liberal Experimentation” Period”, in *Middle Eastern Cities 1900-1950 Public Spaces and Public Spheres in Transformation*

**Other References:**
Alison Smithson, “How to Recognize and Read Mat-Building; Mainstream Architecture as It Has Developed Towards the Mat-Building,” *Architectural Design* 1974, no. 9, September, 573–590

Week 6: Modernism / Architecture Scale
10/21


Week 7: Modernism / Architecture Scale (contd)
10/28
*Guest: Hisham Munir (tbc)*


Week 8: Pan Arabism/ Regionalism
11/04


Rassem Badran “Reflections on a Regional Narrative” in *Al Manakh: Gulf survey*, Eds. Ole Bouman, Mitra Khourbou, Rem Koolhaas (Volume/Al Manakh, 2007), 248-249

**Other References**


**Week 9: Informal Settlements**

11/11

**Research Presentations**

Giorgio Agamben, “What is a Camp?,” in *Means Without End*, 37-45


Riem El-Zoghbi, “‘Ashwa’iyyat: Dystopias or Liberated Spaces?”, *Micro-topias of everyday*, International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments v.236, 35-53


Henri Rueff and Alain Viaro, “Palestinian Refugee Camps: From Shelter to Habitat“

**Other References**

Week 10: Globalization  
11/18  
**Research Presentations**  
*Guest: Ahmed Kanna (tbc via Skype)*  
Nada Tarbush, “Cairo 2050: Urban Dream or Modernist Delusion?”, in *Journal of International Affairs*, 65: 2, 171-186  
**Other References**  

Week 11: Environment  
11/25  
*Guest: Yasser Elsheshtawy (tbc)*  

**Other References**


Amale Andraos and Dan Wood “Why are we still learning from Las Vegas?” in *Bidoun, Issue 04, Dubai Issue* (NY: Bidoun, 2005), 47-48

**Weekly Sessions**
Each week, a group of 2 students will present the readings to the class, along with images to illustrate the topic. Please make sure that images and projects and comprehensive to help focus the conversation.

**Illustrated Papers: Presentation Schedule**
9/23: Preliminary Research Presentations (5min/ student)
9/30: Preliminary Research Presentations (5min/ student)
11/11: Final Research Presentations (5min/student)
11/18: Final Research Presentations (5 min/student)

**Grade**
Final Grade will be based on student participation in class, final presentation and final paper, distributed as follows:
Class participation: 50%
Research Presentations: 15%
Final Paper: 35%
Arab Cities in Evolution

Columbia University GSAPP
Fall 2013
ARCHA6454_001_2013_3

Illustrated Papers: Suggested Topics (or similar)

1. Representation of Arab cities/architecture
   Media: film, populist culture...etc (See Sulayman Khalaf “Camel Racing in the Gulf...”)
   Regional comparison
   East/West comparison

2. Embassies

3. Doxiadis
   Proposals for Beirut, Baghdad, Islamabad
   Comparison with Le Corbusier (Chandigarh)
   Comparison with Hassan Fathy

4. Cold War Urbanism
   US vs. USSR struggle for influence / models exported

5. Suburbia as ideological export (See Nathan Citino “Suburbia and Modernization...”)

6. Pan-Arab Infrastructural Projects (Nasser’s Egypt, see Timothy Mitchell “Rule of Experts...”)

7. International Style vs. Regionalism
   Timeline examining shifts (For ex. 1970ies Rise of socially conservative states and Regionalism)

8. Environmental Orientalism
   See Diana K. Davis “Imperialism, Orientalism and the Environment in the Middle East”
   Masdar City
   Catalogue and/or comparison of “green” projects

9. Public vs. Private
   See Janet Abu Lughod on Cairo and Nasser Rabbat “The Arab Revolution takes Back Public Space”
   Analytical drawings of urban conditions (plan/section/axonometric)
   Comparison across cities

10. Housing
    Doxiadis
    Nasser
    Current housing projects

11. Informal Settlements
    Regional or international comparisons

12. Conflict Urbanism (See writings by Eyal Weitzman)

13. Circulation patterns (See Kurose Shigeyuki “A Case Study on Pedestrian Flow System in the Road Network of 18th Century Cairo”)

14. Team X in the MENA Region (See Allison Smithson on the Arab City as Mat Building, Smithsons Masterplan for Kuwait in Al Manakh, Candillis Mastperlan for Al Khobar in Saudi, etc...)

Illustrated Papers Precedents

Nala & de Ostos, The Hanging Cemetery of Baghdad (Vienna: Springer Vienna Architecture, 2007)
Adam Frampton, Jonathan Solomon, Clara Wong, Cities without Ground: A Hong Kong Guidebook (ORO Editions, 2012)