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# Re-iterating Theory in Architecture: from an Imperial to a Provincialized Transnational Pedagogy

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## Abstract

*The study of architectural theory in the Philippines is still in need of a transnational framework beyond the Vitruvian Triad that most architectural academics are wont to teach. Many Southeast Asian architectural institutions, including those in the Philippines, have already embedded in their curricula and in teaching sessions in the design studios, modern and contemporary discourses that expand the issues and problems of the built environment. Beyond Vitruvian principles, neoclassical, or modern references necessitate the need to study architectural theory both intra-disciplinarily and beyond the boundaries of the architecture domain, requiring new problem-solving heuristics and conceptual devices that absorb local and subjugated knowledge. The Philippine experience struggles with the synergy of architecture as a problem-solving practice and architecture as a theoretical discourse. One of the more obvious reasons for such struggle is the dearth of a transnational framework or literature, and its dissemination to Philippine architectural academia. There is an urgent need to expand the theoretical and creative knowledge of architecture students now that institutions are preparing for an overhaul of architecture education in the Philippines and the region of Southeast Asia at large. This region, despite its multiple identities and heterogeneous differences, shares qualities in its geolocational, linguistic, and even colonial experience that can inform or even transform pedagogical frameworks. Necessary to this preparation are new transdisciplinary frameworks that can reassess both form and content in architectural design theory. This paper sees this overhaul challenge as an opportunity to attempt to propose a provincialized and transnational framework of architectural history for reiterating theory in the study of architecture.*

*Keywords:* architecture, empire, architectural theory, imperial architectural education, provincialize, transnational

## I. Empire and Architecture

Much of the basis of 'Western' architectural theory is about empire.

I start with this, as my provocative statement, to initially argue that the recovery of the Classical Roman architecture treatise of Vitruvius<sup>2</sup> (largely based on ancient Greek architecture and prescribed as precedence to an expanding Roman imperial identity) in fourteenth century Europe onwards was a paradigmatic shift towards the writing of new treatises<sup>3</sup> from the Renaissance onwards. Still relatively, the code of global architectural education now, European architectural classicism became the traditional<sup>4</sup> and hegemonic basis of architectural knowledge, from the fifteenth century onwards. These traditional models were embedded in neoclassicist academies in Europe, and the proliferation of neoclassical building activities propagated cultural thinking and building throughout the colonized world. It is not far-fetched nor even that provocative to presume that the European neoclassical (thus colonial) building styles in Southeast Asia are part of this stylistic empire traced back to Vitruvius, who incidentally, also prescribed a comprehensive way to complete the education of the architect in the same treatise.

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<sup>2</sup> Marcus Vitruvius Polio, an architect and military engineer, wrote *De architectura* (named in English as The Ten Books on Architecture) around 26 B.C. and had a long history of being hand copied throughout the period after the fall of Rome. It was believed that a surviving scrolled manuscript was discovered by Italian Renaissance scholar Poggio Bracciolini in the 1400s and was the basis of numerous translations that architecture scholars in Europe produced. These scholars began a project of writing new treatises, often based on, or derived from Vitruvius' text still being read by most architectural historians and theoreticians today.

<sup>3</sup> In the fourteenth century, Leon Battista Alberti was the first to publish a treatise he called *De re aedificatoria*, while other known treatises include those by Cesare Cesariano, Sebastiano Serlio, Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola, Giorgio Vasari, Andreas Palladio, John Ruskin, and a host of others. Some historians and theorists would include Spanish Jesuit Juan Bautista Villalpando in the list, but because of his blatant critique of Vitruvius and religious bias, others doubt a lineage.

<sup>4</sup> The word "traditional" is used here specifically in the context of architectural modern discourse --- there are two senses of the word I wish to clarify, first, the sense in modernist (early twentieth century) assertions that architectural tradition was based on architectural education of the neoclassicist (e.g., École de Beaux Arts) mode which many rejected, and second, tradition as that of a set of beliefs and practices often associated with the wider cultural and social traditions. In keeping with the tone of this paper, it is the first sense of the word that I use in this paper.

This empire argument I am provoking gives way for me to map the genealogy of thinking, especially when considering Roman imperial expansion<sup>5</sup> at the time of Vitruvius' writing. We can read into this context at the dedication page of Vitruvius' text, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, where the whole textual opus was pledged to the Emperor Augustus Caesar as such:

While all foreign nations were in subjection awaiting your beck and call, and the Roman people and senate... were beginning to be guided by your most noble conceptions and policies... I hardly dared, in view of your serious employments, to publish my writings and long considered ideas on architecture. (Vitruvius, 26 B.C.E./1914, Preface)

This dedication acknowledged the rise of Rome as an empire-building global enterprise that later reached northwards to England, southwards to northern Africa and eastwards to India. Even if Vitruvius's text was not the influential treatise of Roman imperial expansionist building, as contemporary architectural analysts suggest, the revival of his *De architectura* was key to the propagation of its principles, or their transformation.

Following this expansion, the rediscovery of the Vitruvian text over half a millennium ago shaped a set of neoclassical design traditions, and this text has been translated, re-interpreted, modified, or referenced by many architects and theorists from Alberti to contemporary scholars. While the eventual fall of the Roman Empire lost a developmental stylistic progression, these new treatises provided both theoretical and prescriptive preservation efforts. This neoclassicism spread widely, especially as academies appeared all over Europe, enhancing a specialized project of thinking and writing architecture. As impetus for new world urbanization and European presence in their colonial territories, building in the neoclassicist style (with the propagation of the imperial Laws of the Indies, especially in the Hispanic colonies) marked the colonial legacy through architecture. In Southeast Asia and the global south, European colonialism left such architectural marks, through its neoclassical buildings and cities, akin to the Classical Roman project of empire. These legacies configure part of the common threads for colonized Southeast Asia, despite the administrative (colonial) and stylistic differences.

## II. Literary and methodological landscapes of the discourse on empire in architecture

My provocations extend this challenge to reassess how literature suggests the same. As most scholars focused on the colonial project as the instigator of the spread of western thought, particularly discourses on what Orientalism, primarily Said's (1978), the impact of

orientalism on architectural discourse was significant (Çelik, 1992, 2018; Crinson, 1996; Metcalf, 1989; Mitchell 1988, and Rabat, 2018). We can use Orientalist discursive devices to iterate an argument about modes of thinking largely shaped by colonial representations. These representational critiques were especially crucial in cultural processes and architectural productions and were suggested in local experiences of empire building when these motivations were still at play in the 20th century, especially by the French (Çelik, 2008; Wright, 1991).

From these, key architectural writers have indeed challenged their audiences into thinking about using "empire" not just as conjectures, but as an expanded cultural and economic frame of reference for imagining the scope of colonial projects of the West, particularly in South and Southeast Asia. The frames focus not just on architecture and buildings, but on modern colonial urbanization, a scale proportional to imperial justifications. Anthony King's (1976) early writings on colonial urban development maps the assumption that imperial desires are at play to specify how buildings and urban development are produced to enhance the economic advantage of (the British) empire and the subsequent cultural production within the British systems of colonization and empire building (King, 2004). Gwendolyn Wright's (1991) work on the politics of urban design in French Indochina puts an imperial landscape that maps urban and architectural processes in Southeast Asia. In the early to late twentieth century, imperial policymaking subsequently implemented a (French) style that can shape the project of colonization.

In the Philippines, American imperialist desires are primarily in Gerard Lico and Lorelei De Viana's (2017) imperial imagination and McKenna's (2017) imperial pastoral, both built on American sources and archives that configures the project of colonial rule within the narrative of imperialist ambitions, as well as contradictions. It was clear for them that the United States, desiring to become the newest empire to emerge from the north, needed these technologies of rule for their territorial acquisitions. Beaux-arts trained American architect Daniel Burnham already knew the stylistic technology for such and continues the tradition of neoclassical architecture firmly embedded in the physical environments all over the Philippine archipelago. Education was part of the technological rule for Filipino architects, and many were trained in the Beaux-arts school and configured the framework of architectural education in the Philippines. In this light, we can safely assume that the Beaus-arts traditional architectural education became a de facto frame for a pedagogical canon for the Philippines, even as modernist tendencies in the designs of architects are beginning to emerge, especially after World War II.

Methodologically, the way the provocations are argued in this essay was through an analytical interrogation of the

took this opportunity to advance his position and to codify a style for such expansion.

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<sup>5</sup> Recall that Augustus's reign as the first emperor was also the beginning of the imperial expansion of Rome. Vitruvius perhaps

literature and how the ideas of empire and transdisciplinarity are articulated in this paper. Indeed, as the literature above indicates, these issues cannot be reiterated without the seminal framework of decolonization and orientalism. This process assumes that additional work needs to challenge assertions in Philippine and Southeast Asian architectural academies in the region that still subscribe to Western, Beaux-arts-related architectural education canon. It is poignant to know that educators have already called for such decolonization in education, adding, not just local knowledge, conditions, and experience, but also the disciplinary and contemporary social conditions that were left unintegrated (Shahjahan et al., 2021; Zheng, 2025).

While, I have personally engaged on theoretical musings beyond architecture as an academic over the past 25 years (i.e., in anthropology, critical theory and museological practice), it was only recently, when teaching architecture has opened the possibility of entertaining discourse that expands colonial and post-colonial issues in pedagogy. My experience in teaching architectural history, theory and criticism over the past eight years exposed this and various other inconvenient issues in the teaching of architectural theory brought up during discussions amongst undergraduate and graduate students. The exposition of these issues in classroom discussions became underlying questions developed in the final reflection papers for theory classes. Two undergraduate samples are added in this essay that shows how we can see their way of thinking that struggles between the formal and the experiential accounts of architectural design theory itself (permission was granted by the students to publish their names).

My involvement with the review of the architectural curriculum in the Philippines (with an initial goal of internationalization and integrating it with ASEAN architectural pedagogies) and engagements with several educators became an informal ethnographic platform that allowed for observation and further participatory discussions about content. What was missing in the discussions was an articulation of such curricula towards decolonization (and Euro-American architectural hegemonic pedagogy), much less theory, and this essay aims to fill that gap. And while these informal engagements did not have the initial formalized activities for research, it necessitated speculation on how the issue of imperial and transnational architectural education and theory can be put forward as a research agenda. At least one prospective graduate student has expressed interest to further this research, and this essay forms an initial framework for it.

<sup>6</sup> This paragraph and inset were provided to introduce architectural language to an audience of non-architects.

### III. Transnational Disciplinary Theory

To frame this in the context of transnational architectural theory, let me then begin with how architecture is understood within its disciplinary boundaries.<sup>6</sup> Often, only architects understand each other, with talk of form, space, order, first principles, and representational processes. Even today, these are basic components of design theory that all architecture students should use in the design processes. This basic list (see Figure 1) is a major part of architectural theory — an offshoot of Vitruvian and neoclassical texts — and we shall consider this *as* architectural language (or jargon). Furthermore, this *is* also its practice, and is understood, even currently, in the larger transnational (global) architectural pedagogy.

**Figure 1**

Summary of some systems and components that articulate the language of architecture

- **Architectural Form** as enveloping and massing, historically formal reference and precedence, the representational (drawing) process, and even architectonic systems.
- **Space** through the planning of functioning areas of the building, organizing and articulation of geometries and their volumes in a location or at a site; architectural space needs to be organized on Euclidean and Cartesian planes.
- **Formal Order**, through meaningful organization, or an identity, an idea, a *parti*, an organization of form and space.
- **First Principles** of design, including but not limited to axis, datum, symmetry, hierarchy, rhythmic repetition and its transformations, proportion, unit-to-whole harmony.
- **Design of Atmospheres** that account for lived experiences and other cultural, ephemeral, or phenomenological and geo-climatic considerations.

In neoclassicist architecture, theory is practice, despite relying heavily on guild craftsmen, representing (or drawing) architecture and the principles and theories that came with it. Architecture was studied in European art and architecture academies — ruins of Classical Greece and Rome were documented and copied, and this process was a sign of an educated architect. As an example, a design competition winner of a French neoclassical academy will visit ancient sites in Rome, Greece, and other sites of antiquity around the Mediterranean as a main prize. The documenters who analyzed classical architecture and its proportions, scale, and details, and those who published treatises based on these, and on the reading of Vitruvian text itself, are the traditionalist theoreticians.

**Table 1**  
Theory as Representational Practice in Architecture

Neoclassical (Renaissance to the Nineteenth Century)	Modernist to the Twentieth Century
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mimesis (of Classical Greek and Roman forms and principles)</li> <li>• Analyses of Vitruvian writings in (new) treatise forms</li> <li>• Establishment of architectural (and art) academies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dogmatic Manifesto</li> <li>• Rejection of Classicist “traditional” forms</li> <li>• Rediscoveries of 18C “revolutionary” architectural writing and thinking</li> <li>• Utopian visions</li> </ul>

In the early 20th century modern architectural education, these traditional (classicist) representational copies of the ancients became a subject of scrutiny and rejection, yet despite these rejections of Classical mimesis, recent scholarship revealed a gamut of architectural principles, still following a set of neoclassicist theories prevailing — in proportions, in perspectival scale, or in representational or drawing nomenclature. Some analyses identify many modernists relying on the floor plan proportions of and spatial distribution within the Greek Temple as spatial references of their designs.<sup>7</sup>

There is also a hegemonic quality to how this architectural language is propagated, and it is always through academia that it is canon. Examples from Classicist canons were drafted in the 17th to the 19th century European academies mimetic of Greek and Roman principles as their ruins were studied and documented. Despite modernists’ insistence on anti-traditional influence, I argue that modern architectural design principles still relied on canons (see Figure 1 on first principles). Even as modernists will initially insist that theirs are not canonical, their designs still seem to trace almost the same tactical theoretical framework that guides architectural design now. Modernism, though, followed through with new social motivations: international homogenization and rationalization, ideological manifestos, social control through space, and utopian goals. Furthermore, even though many of their intentions attempted social relevance and ideologically liberal intentions, their failures marked post responses against their hard-lined philosophies, disdain toward history, and lack of local sensitivities in their prescribed architectural forms. Yet despite these post-responses, both modernist and neoclassicist principles have become pedagogically hegemonic and are ubiquitous in every design process.

As late as 1994, though, views of a theory of architecture were still as varied as it was enigmatic in the context of design pedagogy. Hanno-Walter Kruft (1994) provided a framework that placed it within a historical context, definitively outlining an aesthetics-based understanding of

architecture theory. Taken into account historical contexts, he approached (Western) architectural theory as:

...the sum of what has been consciously formulated as [(the history of) architectural theory], i.e., (the history of) thought [as well as ideas and motivations] on architecture as recorded in written form, that is based on aesthetic categories. The sources of our knowledge about architectural theory are... polyvalent. (Kruft, 1994, p. 17)

As such, these European treatises, or the sum of polyvalent and consciously formulated thought that Kruft writes, have become the baseline content of the theoretical pedagogy of architectural thinking and design. Again, this architectural pedagogy, with empire-building origins, exported through European colonization of the continents, implying a hegemonic understanding of what architecture should be and how it should be thought and taught, is what we are still working with now, even in post-colonial and post-modernity education. And these pedagogies have been translated into the building of our (Southeast Asian) shared colonial heritage buildings.

Many examples of Southeast Asian colonial buildings are implied by this. And this implied hegemonic architecture is not just architectural, but also epistemological, ontological, and cultural. Knowledge on the nature of local architecture had been stifled, to say the least, and racial biases implied in some literature on architecture were due in part to the idea that indigenous architectural production was banal, vernacular, and as such, not Architecture (with a capital “A”). This is apparent in the fact that vernacular architecture, whether in Southeast Asia or elsewhere, was never part of the canon of architectural studies, much less architectural theory. It is evident in the Philippines that even as late as the 1970s, some scholars were still searching for an archaeologically glorious past of building traditions to be inscribed into this capital A in Philippine architecture. The implications even move to how (urban) development is viewed as dichotomized and binary: developed/undeveloped, East/West, progressive/indigenous, urban/rural, modern / backward, and the list goes on.

Back in the 1980s, many attempted to offer an analysis of the indigeneity of urban theory (O’Connor, 1983). Expressing this uneven divide, one must start with how the West views the idea of urban progress and suggest, alternatively, the more phenomenological idea of meaning. O Connor’s proposal to rethink urbanization signified the differentiated approach to indigeneity of experience in the early urbanization boom of Southeast Asia, and that the western model of fixed and knowable reality of the first world is not as tenable as it seems in the understanding of the Southeast Asian indigenous experience.

spatial ordering precedence for Mies van der Rohe and a host of other modernists in the twentieth century.

<sup>7</sup> Jacqueline Gargus’s lectures and writing on the history of architecture refer to how the Greek Temple was an important

#### IV. “Trans-” as a Conceptual Device

It is at this point that I suggest conceptualizing architecture, in its training and in practice for Southeast Asia, as both transnational and transgressive to allow us to see the nuances of teaching architectural theory critically. While these two “trans” references offer divergent ideas, the heuristic capacity of the prefix is conceptually useful. Understanding the transnationality of architecture in the region acknowledges the shared experiences of colonial and Orientalized histories in this part of the global south; its common phenomenological realities (i.e., in the lived experience of its mainland and island inhabitants—tropicality, references to water, including its management, resilience of perhaps archaic worldviews within their adopted religions, acceptance of transnational exchange, etc.); and, even while mostly inferred by Austronesian linguistic culture, the configurations of the house-on-stilts architectural elements. Transdisciplinary thinking, on the other hand, acknowledges the permeability of (academic) disciplines, which must now be recognized as (positive) transgressions. This recognition softens the insularities of disciplines and allows us to think about architecture both being informed by and engaged in other disciplines about architecture and vice versa. This also capacitates architecture as a discipline to open its interdisciplinary culture of simply being informed or to inform, to being actively collaborative in transgressing both disciplinary limitations.

As conceptual devices, tabulated below, I suggest how these, from my point of view now as an architect, can help assuage and get past the binary divides (of western-eastern theory and discourse) and rethink the idea of de-centering a region like Europe (as colonial originator of architectural ideas until the twentieth century) or Southeast Asia (as receiver of shard-like information through colonial education) towards an acceptance that knowledge had already been created, but must be re-allocated. These conceptual devices (see Table 2), both in the negative and affirmative, are combined in the hopes of critically surveying the impact and flow of “knowledge shards” that describe the nature of academic and theoretical production in the Philippines and Southeast Asia.

**Table 2**  
Architecture Research for a Transnational Practice

“Trans-” as a Conceptual Device:	Transnational Productions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trans-disciplinarity</li> <li>• Open architectural disciplinary limits</li> <li>• Inscribe other disciplines</li> <li>• Resolve disciplinary vocabularies</li> <li>• Transitional (contemporary) theories</li> <li>• Transgressive methods that:</li> <li>• allow disciplines to peek through and participate in disciplinary debates</li> <li>• allow architecture to seep its intra-disciplinary formality into the debate</li> <li>• ‘provincialize’ knowledge ‘centers’</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transgressive practice of architecture: “Western principles” to interrogate</li> <li>• Austronesian / SE Asian transgressions</li> <li>• Austronesian vernaculars</li> <li>• Transnational critique of the:</li> <li>• Colonial</li> <li>• Insular</li> <li>• Modernist</li> <li>• Hegemonic</li> <li>• Neoliberal</li> <li>• Re-inscriptions of the subjugated local</li> </ul>

This idea of the transdisciplinary approach has been around in many disciplinary debates<sup>8</sup> but in architectural education and practice, the same conceptualizing process became more pronounced as Linder (2017) argues that:

“(T)ransdisciplinary work navigates a contested field of discourses that have been claimed, structured, and adapted to specific disciplines. (Thus), transdisciplinarity scrutinizes architecture’s *appearance* and seeks its *significance* in the forms of other disciplines, or the spaces between disciplines, but in no way abandons the specific modes of the architectural discipline.” (Linder, 2017, p.13)

An entanglement muddles the discipline, and rightly so, as we acknowledge a decentering of architectural ideas to enhance the localized knowledge of rebuilding site/culture-specific environments.

Yet here in the Philippines, the idea of trans-disciplinarity seems to have already become embedded in architectural interrogatory negotiations, perhaps already a second nature to a people whose cultural practice was capitalized by multiple shards of knowledge. These entangled shards were amalgamations of disciplinary learning reduced into the anthropological and historical significance of the building, in understanding the psychological nature of users, or even in the impact on the environment.

Notice these social studies disciplines are anthropology, history, psychology, or environmental studies, with vocabularies very much different from the act of building, much less the act of designing. With different disciplinary

<sup>8</sup> The transdisciplinary debate may be understood in several waves of academic exercises especially in science and technology according Jay Bernstein’s 2015 review (as well as in Osborne 2015) although the idea of softening the disciplinary borders of hard science and soft science and their problematic specializations may perhaps go as far back as Immanuel Kant’s persuasions to viewing problems within the notion of

interconnectivity. The academic debates in Europe and the United States follow critiques of historically condition thinking: structuralism, disciplinary specialization, and questions on dichotomies, among others. Nicolescu’s (2002) “manifesto of transdisciplinarity” became the most recent call for the critique of hardline disunity of science and the humanities and its consequences.

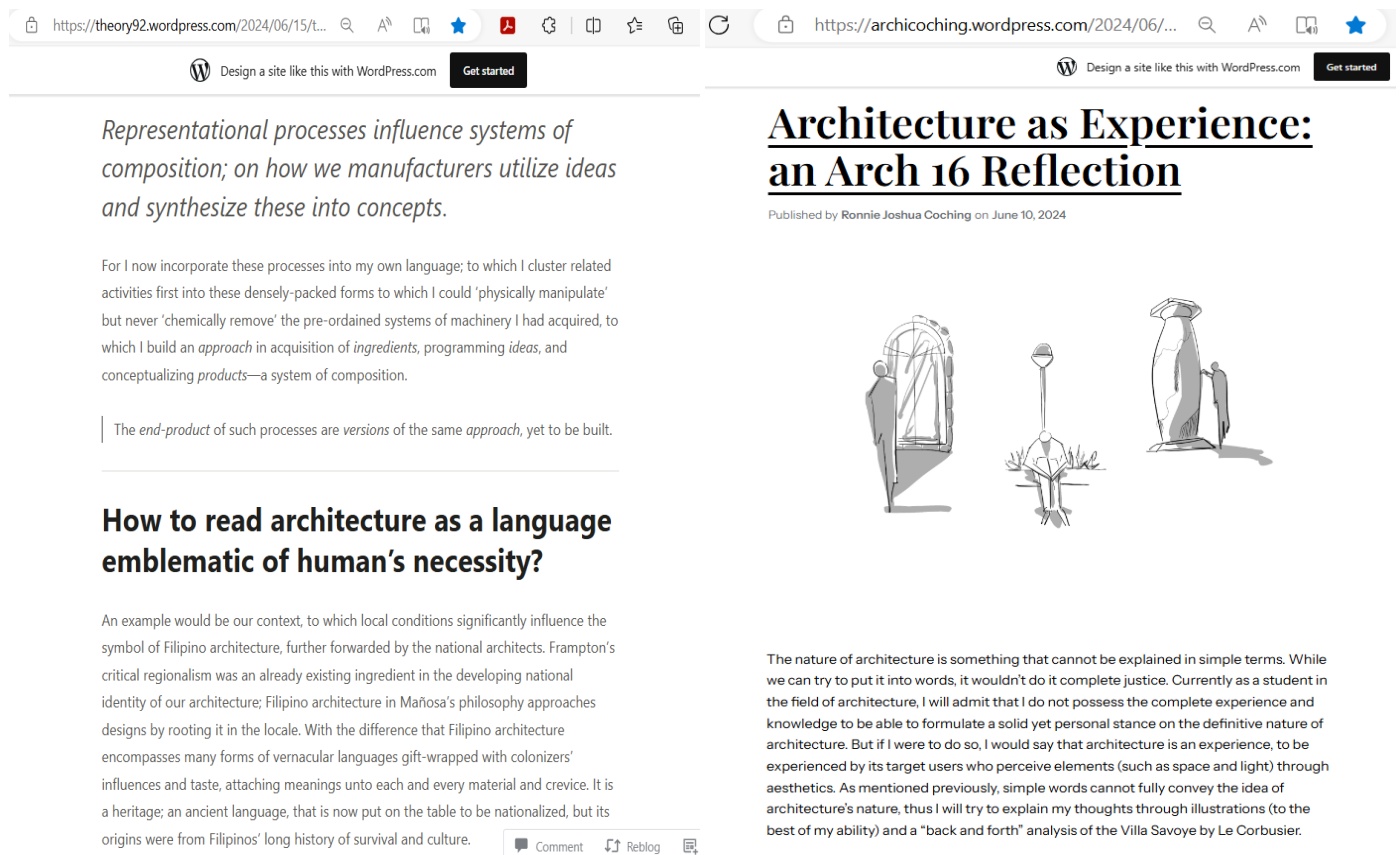
vocabularies, even the word “tradition” might not be easily translated to architecture, as tradition in architectural praxis often hearkens to the pre-modern design vocabulary, i.e., the canon of classical and neoclassical European architecture.<sup>9</sup> Such is the bias that confronts all other disciplines, challenging the operationalization of transdisciplinary thinking.

In my theory classes, I often invite students to always remind themselves that architecture’s representational language and vocabulary, such as proportion, scale, harmony, etc. were part of architectural traditional canon, despite its contemporary use. I also invite them to explore

how such canon is evident in Philippine architectural heritage, both colonial and traditional. This is not always an easy task. These interrogations, however, need to be coded through pedagogical frameworks for educators to be more succinct in their transference. The challenge of transnationalizing architectural theory that educators and students face now, and how theory is engaged in the process of architectural design, is intimidating, as my students have struggled in their writing and in their design. Figure 2 shows two of the most creative theory assignment outputs as blogs by my students last semester.

Figure 2

Two of the many good examples of my students’ work and blog on theory, after giving them a brief about going back to the language of architecture.



Note. Left (1a), Brian Axel Ycoy; right (1b), Ronald Joshua Coching. Website screenshot for illustration purposes only. The author was given permission by the aforementioned undergraduate students to post a partial screenshot of their blog post, above.

<sup>9</sup> These ‘mistranslations’ are not just disciplinary dilemmas, or problem of disciplinary vocabulary, but also a problem of trans-continental didactic disjunction. For former colonies, ‘tradition’ is indeed a cultural necessity, and something to be sought after as

centuries of colonial occupation led to a ‘loss of identity.’ Indeed, if an architectural history educator mentions ‘tradition,’ a student may conjure local associations of heritage instead of (Classical) architectural precedence.

## V. The Task of Provincializing Architectural Theory Now

The “trans” conceptual device is indeed risky. Rethinking theory within the fold of transnationalism and transdisciplinarity involves rethinking architecture’s history and its biases, as well as its vocabulary, following a framework that is more open and engaging. Furthermore, it will be a daunting task for architectural educators and practitioners in the Philippines and Southeast Asia.

Confronting historical biases includes the deployment propagated by pedagogy, but must be de-hegemonized and decolonized. It should include knowledge subjugated by colonial and hegemonic education through decodifying canonical principles and re-inscribing these subjugated knowledges as equal, not marginal ideas. Theory must then translate back into design and transition the re-inscribed knowledge that confronts biases into local and regional histories. This includes the difficult decision to incorporate the study of the vernacular (and, the Austronesian legacy, for Southeast Asia) that had long been considered outside of and excluded architectural canon, despite its ubiquity (e.g., dwelling places) and accounting for more than half of all architectural (or building) production.

But many documentation and scholarly activities in the past 120 years or so imply a range of historically significant moments of both exclusion and inclusion in architectural studies, with such documentation embedded with interests in, or problematic theories and speculations on primitivism (and colonial racism), ethnic differentiations, structuralist ethnography or its contemporary counterparts. Relatively recent architectural literature did provide alternative rigorous documentation and analysis, as well as themes involving contemporary conditions (see Fathy, 1969; Fox et al., 1993; Oliver, 1986; Rapoport, 1969; Rudofsky, 1964) including environmental issues and technologies, and socio-cultural phenomena (e.g., indigeneity and modernity and adaptations to it) that problematize these early works and attempt to see value in considering indigenous, transnational or even universal ideas. The task is how to engage this marginal content (the small “a” of architecture) into pedagogical codes (the capital “A” in architecture) that merit theoretical, scientific, humanistic, and artistic analyses. I am not suggesting re-canonizing

architecture per se, the codifying task of subjugated knowledge indeed is or should be part of the critique of canons.

In the past few decades, many researchers have unearthed several archival materials linked to colonial building in the Philippines (Galende, 1987; Jose, 1991; Zialcita, et al., 1987 among the locally and internationally published ones)<sup>10</sup>. Several recent publications by Regalado Trota Jose (2020, 2022) reviewed the potential cultural transfer processes (Jose, 2020, p. 1), tracing the genealogies of architectural design of the late sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century convents and churches. To further the trans-colonial cultural transfer of architectural tradition, the task of hinting at the theoretical processes that this knowledge genealogy provided (i.e., from Jaun Bautista Villalpando in Spain to Sebastiano Serlio) also requires a complicated analysis of European history of theory (see Kruff’s 1994 comprehensive historicization, particularly that of Spain).

The task further complicates architectural theory in the ways that Filipino and Southeast Asian local (and vernacular) architectures are often considered ahistorical, and while there is documentary evidence leading to their historicization, the heterogeneity of localized architectural adaptations is complex. The big picture of Austronesian studies may provide linguistic (i.e., spatial and experiential vocabulary) aspects of theorizing local architecture as a starting point for transnationalizing this task. But I should caution that the task also includes a decentering of potential canonization of Austronesian knowledge regimes. Besides, not all of mainland Southeast Asia has had Austronesian roots, and this decentering burden needs to be a prevailing mode of thinking, learning from the colonial experience.

I initially proposed to the Philippine Architectural Schools Association and the United Architects of the Philippines<sup>11</sup> the following theory content that can be distributed in the design syllabi (as preliminary proposal, adopting their own canonical framework on architectural design pedagogy), outlining how architectural theory, passed on to us since the colonial period, can be distributed to contribute to building theoretical issues for design courses.

Much of these (see left column of the top table, Figure 3) architecture pedagogical tomes are foundational, as taught globally: the nature of

<sup>10</sup> Pioneers of Spanish (colonial) architecture in the Philippines include Pedro Ortiz Armengol, Maria Lourdes Diaz-Trechuelo Spinola, and a host of scholarly and documentation work going back to the late 1800s: Manuel Hebella y Perez and Felix de Huerta, Elviro Jorde Perez, among others.

<sup>11</sup> This was presented at the Tripartite Network Meeting of

the United Architects of the Philippines through its Commission on Education (UAP-CommEd), the Philippine Architecture Schools Association (PhilASA) and the Philippine Regulatory Commission’s (PRC) Board of Architecture on April 17, 2024, in Pasay City. The framework I proposed was a modification of the curricular framework I helped develop for the De La Salle University-Lipa in early 2021.

architecture; fundamentals in creative composition; elements of form; principles, attributes, and intentions in design; architectural order; systems in architecture; concept generation; architectural space. My proposal now is to provincialize (borrowing the concept by Dipesh Chakrabarty)<sup>12</sup> these Euro-hegemonic ideas, to decenter their canonicity, to de-imperialize and decolonize their original framework, and to redistribute architecture's new heterogenous vocabulary and content.

**Figure 3**  
The task of provincializing architectural theory for design.

Scope and Possible Design Applications:  
**THE SEARCH FOR FIRST PRINCIPLES (in progression)**

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Theory & Practice Scope of Learning	Year 1 Foundational	Year 2 Types, Typologies & Differentiation	Year 3 Society (The Public)	Year 4 Projects by Complexity	Year 5 Research & Thesis
Nature of Architecture	Ontological nature, Art, Process, Representation, Method, Product	Archi as Object: form, patterns, similarities, difference	Architecture as negotiated practice	Philosophy of Architecture	Theory FOR/IN practice
Fundamentals in Creativity & Composition	Form generation, Spatial exercises, Missing image	Representational surveys for compositional methodologies	Canonical nomenclature	& Critical Composition: new representational methods	Independent Creative Design Research
Elements of Form (in 2D & 3D)	Geometric/topological, Spatial object, Form intent	Surfaces, Element systems, tectonic systems	Language (legibility & meaning) & Public Impact of Form	Complex forms & their fabrication/manufacture	Tectonic, Structural, Envelop explorations of Form
Principles & Attributes of (intentional) Design	Prosa, Symm, Rhythm, Grid, Contrastness, Strength, LRI	Element Features, Scale, Pattern, Transformed repetition, etc.	What is beautiful? [?]	Universal Design — is there one?	Explorations/innovations on aesthetics of design
Architectural Order	Ordering Principles: axis, hierarchy, left, right, u-w	Grid, Datum (registering differences), topological datum	Program & programming	Zonality & Scale	Preposed order, program & zone formalizations?
Systems for Architecture	Spatial, Archi-Tectonic, Envelope	Type/category as system	Multi-use/type systems	Systems network	Integrated systems
Concept Generation	Idea, Part, Diagram	Conceptual devices: dialogue & transformation	Conceptual devices: defamiliarization	Contemporary Concepts	Proposed new concepts
Space	[1] Site, Prop/Scale, [1] Context, [2] Event (Program)	Spatial Languages (Specific to type or atypical space, ex. ramp/stair)	Space, Program & Code Requirements	Complex planning (e.g., multi building, et al.)	Integrated formal & regulated space planning

Scope and Possible Design Applications:  
**THE SEARCH FOR FIRST PRINCIPLES (in progression)**

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Theory & Practice Scope of Learning	Year 1 Foundational	Year 2 Types, Typologies & Differentiation	Year 3 Society (The Public)	Year 4 Projects by Complexity	Year 5 Research & Thesis
Nature of Architecture	Ontological nature, Art, Process, Representation, Method, Product	Archi as Object: form, patterns, similarities, difference	Architecture as negotiated practice	Philosophy of Architecture	Theory FOR/IN practice
Fundamentals in Creativity & Composition	Form generation, Spatial exercises, Missing image	Representational surveys for compositional methodologies	Canonical nomenclature	& Critical Composition: new representational methods	Independent Creative Design Research
Elements of Form (in 2D & 3D)	Geometric/topological, Spatial object, Form intent	Surfaces, Element systems, tectonic systems	Language (legibility & meaning) & Public Impact of Form	Complex forms & their fabrication/manufacture	Tectonic, Structural, Envelop explorations of Form
Principles & Attributes of (intentional) Design	Prosa, Symm, Rhythm, Grid, Contrastness, Strength, LRI	Element Features, Scale, Pattern, Transformed repetition, etc.	What is beautiful? [?]	Universal Design — is there one?	Explorations/innovations on aesthetics of design
Architectural Order	Ordering Principles: axis, hierarchy, left, right, u-w	Grid, Datum (registering differences), topological datum	Program & programming	Zonality & Scale	Preposed order, program & zone formalizations?
Systems for Architecture	Spatial, Archi-Tectonic, Envelope	Type/category as system	Multi-use/type systems	Systems network	Integrated systems
Concept Generation	Idea, Part, Diagram	Conceptual devices: dialogue & transformation	Conceptual devices: defamiliarization	Contemporary Concepts	Proposed new concepts
Space	[1] Site, Prop/Scale, [1] Context, [2] Event (Program)	Spatial Languages (Specific to type or atypical space, ex. ramp/stair)	Space, Program & Code Requirements	Complex planning (e.g., multi building, et al.)	Integrated formal & regulated space planning

**PROVINCIALIZE:**  
de-center, de-empire the framework  
re-distribute vocabulary and language

The second set (Figure 4) is of new issues that need to be localized as network assemblages, even as these newly inscribed first principles become theories that interrogate contemporary issues like experience, localized sites, local legal restrictions, local science and methods, or local practice. I propose the “concept of assemblage” to retain the localization of knowledge yet networked transnationally. Knowledge indigenization needs to be de-coupled—from the vocabulary of modernism and its regulations; from capitalism and its regulatory liberalization; and even from contemporary conditions that can slip into autonomous knowledge regimes like climate volatility, socio-cultural heritage,

<sup>12</sup> In Chakrabarty’s postcolonial concept, to provincialize implies challenging and decentering Europe (and by extension, the West—both geographically and intellectually) as being the only influential voice of universal knowledge or theory, and that it is but just one of a multitude of intellectual provinces. This task can be done by acknowledging both historical and experiential heterogeneity, that theoretical models and themes like development, capitalism, modernity

and the increasing human-to-non-human networks (or the post-human) created by the twenty-first century thinking. Areas of theory that need to be re-assessed for provincializing, decolonizing, or de-modernizing show how the contemporary condition is heterogeneous, thus the need to see them as assemblages.

**Figure 4**  
The task of localizing specific networks of knowledge regimes is immediately transdisciplinary.

Scope and Possible Design Applications:  
**THE SEARCH FOR FIRST PRINCIPLES (in progression)**

Lorenda Gines, Jr., UAP  
Asst. Prof., U.P. College of Architecture

Theory & Practice Scope of Learning	Year 1 Foundational	Year 2 Types, Typologies & Differentiation	Year 3 Society (The Public)	Year 4 Projects by Complexity	Year 5 Research & Thesis
Experience	Fig-Ground Relics; Perception of Mass & Volume	Perception of Form & Space (cultural & social)	Atmospheric Representation (sensorial)	Environmental Experience & Atmospheres	Integrated perceptive experiences
Site & Context	[1] Sitelines, [2] Analysis of locational environments	Type & Typology (for neighborhood SAC)	Architecture for/of the City	Regions & Environments	Analysis & Design of site & context Proposed (new?) standards, integrated codes
Limits & Parameters	Architecture & non-architecture, types (leaves survey)	Standards, Local Codes & Ordinance types	Local & National (for disciplinary) Codes	International Codes	Proposed (new?) standards, integrated codes
Science	Architecture as technology (survey), tectonic, materials	Technology as public architecture	Network frameworks of technologies (form-rural)	Explorations on future technologies	Explorations/innovations on the science of design
Art	Formal and non-formal (school) architecture	Cultural value of architecture	Aesthetics & ethics of public architecture	Architecture as art	Proposed aesthetic design
Issues	Proxemics, vernacularity, cultural image of archite	Typology v. Morphology	Political, Social, Cultural pressures	Environmental responsibility (Sustainability et al.)	Advanced & contemporary issues for architecture
Practice: precedent types	Individual observations (& perceived preferences)	Local & Regional practices, limitations & precedents	Global practices, limitations & precedents	Critical precedent analysis	Implications to practice & profession
LOCAL KNOWLEDGE	Site-specific knowledge	Differentiated types (heterogeneity)	Posthuman networking	Scalar Regional complexities	Advanced: transnational aesthetics

**LOCALIZE THE NETWORKS OF KNOWLEDGE**

This further requires the reassessment of historically produced (European) language of architectural theory (including Pythagorean progressions, geometric manipulations, form properties, etc.), quite different from the intellectual province of (European) art but sharing common theoretical visual principles that architects and students of architecture already use in design. The possibility of merging these principles into new provinces theory and practice for architecture is still not without difficulty, but perhaps we can start with understanding the synergy between architectural theory as already formalized, and the consideration of ideas from the relatively recent province of vernacular architecture.

and even history had been experienced differently in many colonized areas like Southeast Asia. His ‘provincialization’ idea recognizes the validity of other intellectual and theoretical ‘provinces,’ a powerful conceptual device, in my opinion. This sets a positive tone of operationalizing the problematics of several themes like Orientalist intellectual imaginations and production, subjugated knowledges and more, towards not just that of challenging dominant narratives but also that of producing inclusive theoretical heterogeneity.

Two quite different examples of modernist cultural icons use vernacular references for architectural form development – notice how approaches to design differ in these two architects: (Figure 5) the Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center in New Caledonia by French-Italian architect Renzo Piano, use Kanak roofing elements and not the overall form, to be the precedent parti (or design reference) of the architecture.

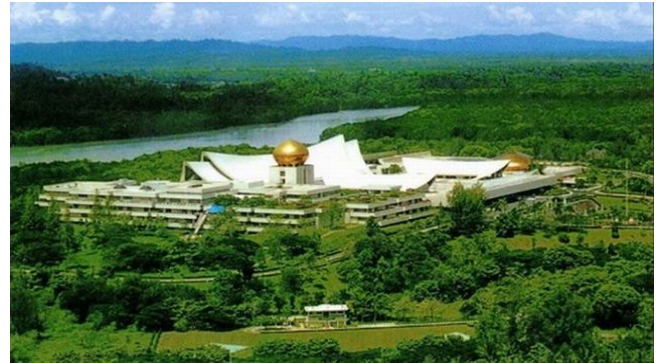
**Figure 5a**  
Renzo Piano's Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center, New Caledonia [a. Aerial view, top]



**Figure 5b**  
Renzo Piano's Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center, New Caledonia [b. Kanak roof construction within the site, bottom]



**Figure 6**  
Leandro Locsin's Istana Nurul Iman, the Sultan's Palace, Brunei Darussalam



In Figure 6, Filipino architect Leandro Locsin's work in Brunei Darussalam seems to have been a derivation of the *Minangkabau* roof form, despite its somewhat distant ethnic affinities to Brunei. Such west-east conceptualizations, as part of an architectural modernity of the vernacular, are still informed by a modernist project, as far as I'm concerned, but perhaps we can also reference and transgress into these, and other works from different disciplines, such as linguistics and philosophy to provincialize future architectural designs.

Some proposals for such include the consideration of knowledge building from different fields and domains, like linguistics, conceptualized because of semantic proximities in architecturally related words, that can be framed within the provincialization of architectural theory that helps transition and translate into contemporary post-capitalist and post-postmodern conditions

Aside from the many issues I raised and suggested earlier, I would like to propose some reflections on the following conditions for the teaching of architectural theory:

A trans-Southeast Asian approach, or combined regional and local approaches to the contemporary, tropical, archipelagic/mainland strategies in architectural knowledge production, also implies architectural theory as philosophical rethinking specific to the region, entailing:

- 1- Asking transnational questions about the nature of architecture itself and identifying the sort of things that define architecture, including how to include the non-designed vernacular architectures of Southeast Asia, and the larger Austronesian linguistic regions (and beyond them) as part of the scope of architectural theory;
- 2- asking epistemological questions to continue to know what needs to be known, and to reason effectively that such knowledge must be inclusive, and that applies to architecture's main

purpose, which is to design and build the well-being of life itself; and

- 3- the continuing establishment of new thinking in the twenty-first century, building from the regional shared experiences that suppose a new condition of the present, and a possible volatile future.

These follow calls for furthering the limited scholarship on decolonization of curricula (Na Zheng, 2025) and architectural education by actively provoking a re-iteration of pedagogies despite a modern frame with colonial footprints. It is ironic, if not contradicting, that papers and essays like these (and mine) are still valuing first principles when calling for paradigm shifts. Yet this is still the limitation of contemporary education and will still be the challenge until new models of knowledge production and consumption are offered. Consistent collaborations among institutions must resolve this.

I end with these additional commentaries on approaching the re-inscription of the local voice. Architectural theory is no longer confined to its Western genealogies of knowledge regimes. Local (and translocal) voices need to be encoded as open-ended theories and see knowledge as shards rather than regimes, which can be assembled as networks (assemblage). Transnationalism and cosmopolitanism are two socializing forms with diverging goals: one is a regional exchange; the other is a contemporary global aspiration of fair exchange—something to reflect on further. However, even as divergent as they seem, both require obligatory responsibilities in thinking about exchange, that of disrupting the imagined boundaries of state, citizenship, autonomy, or differentiated notions of equality, products of colonial and modernist thinking and policies of subjugation. If the Southeast Asian community is already a transnational heterogeneity, perhaps common research on their indigeneity as a theory can initiate and establish transnational exchange on architectural theory, as well.

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