

Course Syllabus

[Jump to Today](#)

Architecture, Building, and Labor

Columbia University GSAPP / Spring 2019

Thursdays, 11am–1pm / 115 Avery Hall

Alexander Wood / ahw2127@columbia.edu

There are few images as central to modernism as the visionary architect creating novel forms with new building technologies. In this seminar we will unpack this image by looking critically at the making of buildings within a larger field of production. The advent of modern building technology radically transformed the building process, creating new, more productive, and intensive patterns of work. In addition, it stimulated the development of new agents of production, including the general contractor, the building material manufacturer, and the modern trade union.

In this seminar we will trace the changing relationship of architectural design, building practices, and labor relations from the mid-nineteenth century to the present while asking a series of key questions: How have architects responded to, adopted, and embraced new building technologies? How has the adoption of specific building methods shaped material flows, social relations, and labor conditions on the site? How did architects position their promotion of new building technologies within larger frameworks of cultural, social, political, and economic policies?

To investigate these issues, we will explore important case studies, read primary texts by architects, engineers, and builders, and secondary literature in social, economic, and labor history. We will also take a global and comparative perspective to examine the history of the building process within capitalist, socialist, and post-socialist economies. Following these readings, students will present their own case studies of a specific building project not discussed in the seminar.

Assignments:

- Each week one or two students will prepare a short one-page paper on the readings for that week to begin our discussion. The papers should identify the themes, issues, and questions you think we should discuss. The paper should be distributed to the class by email no later than the Tuesday before we meet.
- Write a short paper in which you analyze the design, planning, and construction of a building project not discussed in the seminar. Your paper should be fifteen to twenty pages long.

Topics and Readings:

1. Introduction

2. Art, Labor, and Industry in Victorian Britain

John Ruskin, "On the Nature of the Gothic," 1853.

William Morris, "Architecture and History," 1884.

William Lethaby, "The Builder's Art and the Craftsman," 1892.

Raphael Samuel, "Workshop of the World: Steam Power and Hand Technology in mid-Victorian Britain," *History Workshop Journal* 3 (1977), 6-72.

3. The Ring of Saturn: Building in Iron in France

Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le Duc, *Lectures on Architecture* (1875-1880), selections.

Walter Benjamin, "The Ring of Saturn, or Some Remarks on Iron Construction," 1929.

Tom F. Peters, "How the Introduction of Iron in Construction Changed and Developed Thought Patterns and Processes in Design," in Mario Rinke and Joseph Schwartz, eds., *Before Steel: The Introduction of Structural Iron and its Consequences* (Salenstein, Switzerland: Niggli, 2010), 34-72.

Stanley Smith, "Craftsman and Contractor: A Re-Appraisal of their Role in the Design and Fabrication of Mid-Nineteenth Century Iron Structures in Great Britain," *Journal of Architectural Planning and Research* 11 (Winter, 1994), 311-338.

4. Architects, Contractors, and Labor Conflict in Chicago

John W. Root, "A Great Architectural Problem," *Inland Architect* 15 (June 1890), 67-71.

Joanna Merwood Salsbury, "The First Chicago School and the Ideology of the Skyscraper," in Peggy Deamer, ed., *Architecture and Capitalism: 1845 to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 25-49.

Thomas Leslie, "Built Like Bridges: Iron, Steel, and Rivets in the Nineteenth-Century Skyscraper," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 69 (June 2010), 234-261.

Jane Bonshek, "The Skyscraper: A Catalyst of Change in the Chicago Construction Industries, 1882-1892," *Construction History* 4 (1988), 53-74.

5. The Cathedral of Commerce: Skyscraper Building in the Progressive Era

Cass Gilbert, "The Architect's Approbation," in *The Master Builders: A Record of the Construction of the World's Highest Commercial Structure* (New York, 1913), 7-8.

Gail Fenske, "A Record-Breaking Feat of Modern Construction," in *The Skyscraper and the City: The Woolworth Building and the Making of Modern New York* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 166-215.

Ronald Mendel, "Craft Labor and the Development of Trade Unionism among Building Tradesmen in Late Nineteenth Century New York," *Construction History* 14 (1998), 3-19.

David Montgomery, "Whose Standards? Workers and the Reorganization of Production in the United States, 1900-1920," in *Worker's Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 113-134.

David Brody, "Economy and Labor," in *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960), 27-50.

6. The Workshops of Modernity in Interwar Europe

Le Corbusier, *Towards an Architecture*, selections.

Mary McLeod, "Architecture or Revolution: Taylorism, Technocracy, and Social Change," *Art Journal* 43 (Summer, 1983), 132-147.

Charles S. Maier, "Between Taylorism and Technocracy: European Ideologies and the Vision of Industrial Productivity in the 1920s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5 (1970), 27-61.

7. Architect as Organizer: Experiments in Mass Production in the Soviet Union

Mosei Ginzburg, "The Objectives of Contemporary Architecture," 1927.

Boris Arvatov, *Art and Production*, 1926, selections.

Mika Bliznakov, "The Realization of Utopia: Western Technology and Soviet Avant-Garde Architecture," in William C. Brumfield, ed., *Reshaping Russian Architecture:*

Western Technology, Utopian Dreams (New York: Woodrow Wilson International Center, 1990), 145-175.

Christina E. Crawford, "From Tractors to Territory: Socialist Urbanization Through Standardization," *Journal of Urban History* 44 (2018), 54-77.

8. Postwar Reconstruction and the Industrialization of Building

Jean Prouvé, "The Organization of Building Construction," 1971.

Nikita Khrushchev, "On Wide-Scale Introduction of Industrial Methods, Improving the Quality and Reducing the Cost of Construction," in *Kruschev Speaks: Selected Speeches, Articles, and Press Conferences, 1941-61*, ed. Thomas P. Whitney (Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1963), 153-92.

Nicholas Bullock, "4,000 Dwellings from a Paris Factory," *ARQ* 13 (2009), 59-72.

9. Spring Break (March 18)

10. Brasilia under Construction

Oscar Niemeyer, "Current Problems with Brazilian Architecture," 1955.

James Holston, *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia* (1989), selections.

Fernando Lara, "Brazilianization or Brazilianization? the first 50 years of Brasília," *Portal* 5 (2010), 12-15

11. The Great Leap Forward: The Collectivization of Architectural Practice in Communist China

Ke Song, "Political Ideology and the Production of Architectural Theories in Mao's China (1949-1976)," *Architectural Histories* 6 (2018), 1-15.

Shusishan Yu, *Chang'an Avenue and the Modernization of Chinese Architecture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 55-102.

Tao Zhu, "Building Big, with No Regret," *AA Files* 63 (2011), 104-110.

12. Iconic Architecture and Migrant labor

Jessica Caplin, "Mirage in the Desert Oasis," *Harvard International Review* 30 (Winter, 2009), 28-32.

William Thompson, "Encounters with Labour: Migrant Workers, Architects, and Building Sites in China," *ARQ* 21 (2017), 285-289.

Laura Diamond Dixit, "Monuments to Maritime Labor: The Dhow, Migration, and the Architecture of the 2022 Qatar World Cup," *The Avery Review* 3 (November 2014).

13. Architecture and Labor in the Digital Age

Peggy Deamer, "Architectural Work: Immaterial Labor," in Katie Lloyd Thomas, Tilo Amhoff, and Nick Beech, eds., *Industries of Architecture* (2015), 137-147.

Pedro Fiori Arantes, "Construction site, design, drawing and collective imagination," in *Field Book* (São Paulo: Escola da Cidade, 2017), 7-21.

Lara Diamond Dixit, Kadambari Baxi, Jordan Carver, and Mabel O. Wilson, *Who Builds Your Architecture: A Critical Field Guide* (2017).