Course Syllabus

Architecture, Building, and Labor

Columbia University GSAPP / Spring 2019

Thursdays, 11am-1pm / 115 Avery Hall

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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


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

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


4. Architects, Contractors, and Labor Conflict in Chicago


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


6. The Workshops of Modernity in Interwar Europe
Le Corbusier, Towards an Architecture, selections.


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

Boris Arvatov, Art and Production, 1926, selections.

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


8. Postwar Reconstruction and the Industrialization of Building


9. Spring Break (March 18)

10. Brasilia under Construction


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

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


12. Iconic Architecture and Migrant labor


13. Architecture and Labor in the Digital Age

