

## OBJECTIVES

Few buildings among the histories of architecture have received as much attention as the Tower of Babel—or illustrate more vividly the ambiguities of architecture’s interdisciplinary appropriations.

Despite the proverbial failure of its builders’ ambitions, Babel has preserved with astonishing endurance its central position among the archetypal structures of architectural narrative. Maintaining a presence throughout the history of architectural thought, the Tower survives for centuries not as a physical object but through representations in text and image—representations that draw their didactic force directly from the absence of the building itself. Its exemplary non-existence is the very thing that lends such vigour to speculative reconstructions, charged all the while by its reputation as a building that by its sheer ambition drew upon itself the wrath of an almighty God. Exploiting the freedoms of its primarily textual conception, its architectural descriptions are invariably accompanied by implied prescriptions for contemporary practice.

This seminar examines the many lives of this extraordinary architectural figure. It studies the arenas of Babel’s appropriation—archaeological, art-historical, theoretical, theological, philosophical, ideological, and literary—as a means of understanding the multivalence of architectural ideas as they circulate within culture. It ends with Babel’s dramatic reassertion under the conditions of modernity as a marker both of aspiration and of doubt; and it aims to speculate on the Tower’s potential future.

## REQUIREMENTS

The seminar meets once a week. A series of brief assignments animates engagement with class material and provides a foundation for discussion and for subsequent research either on an aspect of the appropriation of Babel itself or on the trajectory of a comparable architectural figure. Preliminary research is presented in class; projects that examine history’s engagement with the construction of contemporary architectural ideas are especially welcome. Students are encouraged to take advantage of materials in Columbia’s libraries; the class schedule incorporates sessions with the Avery Classics Collection and at the Rare Book and Manuscript Library, and students are directed toward additional materials at the Met Fifth Avenue and the Thomas J. Watson Library.

## SCHEDULE

1.	<b>9/4</b>	—	—	<b>2019</b>
2.	<b>9/11</b>	—	—	<b>MYTHS OF ORIGIN</b>
3.	<b>9/18</b>	—	—	<b>ARK BEFORE ARCHITECTURE</b>
4.	<b>9/25</b>	—	—	<b>BABYLON OR BABEL</b>
5.	<b>10/2</b>	—	—	<b>GENESIS, AGAIN</b>
6.	<b>10/9</b>	—	<i>paper proposals due</i>	<b>BUILDING, IMAGE, TEXT</b>
7.	<b>10/16</b>	—	—	<b>SPECULATIVE RECONSTRUCTION</b>
8.	<b>10/23</b>	<i>Midterm Week</i>	—	<b>ARCHAEOLOGIES</b>
9.	<b>10/30</b>	—	<i>paper outlines due</i>	<b>UTOPIA/DYSTOPIA</b>
10.	<b>11/6</b>	—	<i>presentations 1/3</i>	<b>LONDON, PARIS, BERLIN, NEW YORK</b>
11.	<b>11/13</b>	—	<i>presentations 2/3</i>	<b>METROPOLITAN ANXIETIES</b>
12.	<b>11/20</b>	—	<i>presentations 3/3</i>	<b>THE LIBRARY AND BABEL</b>
	<b>11/27</b>	<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>	<i>no class</i>	
	<b>12/4</b>	<i>Finals Week</i>	<i>no class</i>	
	<b>12/11</b>	—	<i>papers due</i>	

A6867 Fall 2019  
Wed. 9:00–11:00  
408 Avery  
**Columbia GSAPP**

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# BABEL

**BABEL syllabus 1/4**  
September 6, 2019

## READINGS

### 1. 2019 *Traces of architecture's history*

No readings.

### 2. MYTHS OF ORIGIN *Beginnings and ends*

Genesis 1 [date disputed], New Revised Standard Version.

Vitruvius, "The Origin of the Dwelling House," in *The Ten Books of Architecture* [date disputed], trans. Morris Hicky Morgan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), bk. 2 chap. 1, 38–41.

Marc-Antoine Laugier, "An Essay on Architecture" [1753], trans. Wolfgang and Anni Herrmann, in Harry Mallgrave, ed., *Architectural Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 1:141–46.

Le Corbusier, "Regulating Lines," in *Towards a New Architecture* [1923], trans. Frederick Etchells (1927; repr., New York: Dover, 1986), 65–83.

Francis D. K. Ching, Mark Jarzombek, and Vikramaditya Prakash, *A Global History of Architecture*, 3rd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2017), 1–7.

>> *Choose three of these accounts of architectural beginnings. What are their ostensible ends?*

### 3. ARK BEFORE ARCHITECTURE *Architecture before 1750*

Bernard Rudofsky, preface to *Architecture Without Architects: A Short Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1964).

Hubert Damisch, "Noah's Ark" [1987], trans. Julie Rose, *AA Files* 72 (2016): 115–26.

Christine Spindler, "A Flood of Faith and Knowledge: Kircher's Arca Noë," John J. Burns Library, May 6, 2013, [johnjburnslibrary.wordpress.com/2013/05/06/kircherarcanoe/](http://johnjburnslibrary.wordpress.com/2013/05/06/kircherarcanoe/).

>> *According to Rudofsky, "the question whether the Ark ought to be called a building or a nautical craft is redundant." Is he right?*

### 4. BABYLON OR BABEL *Textbook architecture*

*Study three of the following accounts—produced across a century of architectural-historical pedagogy—of what is ostensibly the same subject. What changes, and which narrative is more compelling?*

Banister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method for the Student, Craftsman, and Amateur*, 6th ed. (London: Batsford, 1921), 44–64, esp. 52–53. See also 828–29.

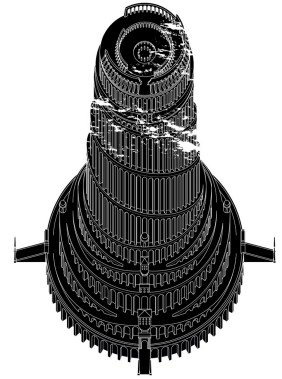
Patrick Nuttgens, *The Story of Architecture*, 2nd ed. (London: Phaidon, 1997), 16–27.

Marvin Trachtenberg and Isabelle Hyman, *Architecture: From Prehistory to Postmodernity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 76–80.

Richard Ingersoll, *World Architecture: A Cross-Cultural History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 33–47, 104–16, esp. 108–12.

Michael Fazio, Marian Moffett, and Lawrence Wodehouse, *Buildings Across Time: An Introduction to World Architecture*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2018), 8–33, esp. 14–20.

>> *Avery Classics session.*



Michele Marchetti for *San Rocco*, "Ecology," 2014, after Athanasius Kircher, 1679.

*The Tower attracts meaning, the way a lightning rod attracts thunderbolts.*

Roland Barthes, 1964

5. **GENESIS, AGAIN** *Biblical architectures and appropriations*

Genesis 11:1–9. *Compare the King James Version with the New Revised Standard Version.*

Claus Westermann, *Genesis*, trans. David E. Green (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), 79–83.

Leon R. Kass, “Technology and the Humanist Dream: Babel Then and Now,” *Reflections* (Center of Theological Enquiry, Princeton, NJ) 7 (Spring 2004): 2–31.

- *Post online five thumbnails of book covers that have appropriated the image of the Tower of Babel, with an accompanying assessment of the significance of the appropriation in each instance.*

6. **BUILDING, IMAGE, TEXT** *The mortality of architecture and the survival of an idea*

Louise Pelletier, “The Building of a Horizon,” *Chora 1, Intervals in the Philosophy of Architecture*, ed. Alberto Perez-Gomez and Stephen Parcell (1994): 189–216.

Georg Gerster, “Monumental Question Marks,” in *Grand Design: The Earth From Above* (New York: Paddington Press, 1976), 255–78.

Robert Rollinger, “Monuments as Symbol” and “Babylon as Argument,” in *Brill’s New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World; Classical Tradition*, ed. Manfred Landfester et al., 5 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2006–10), 1:414–24.

- *For an overview of a thousand years of Babel’s representation, browse the images in Helmut Minkowski, Aus dem Nebel der Vergangenheit steigt der Turm zu Babel: Bilder aus 1000 Jahren, rev. ed. (Berlin: Rembrandt-Verlag, 1960), on reserve.*

7. **SPECULATIVE RECONSTRUCTION** *Paper architectures*

Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, *A Plan of Civil and Historical Architecture*, trans. Thomas Lediard (London, 1730). *Look for the appearance of Babylon.*

John and Andrew Van Rymdyk, “Brick from the Tower of Babel,” in *Museum Britannicum* (London, 1778), 32–33 and tab. 13.

Joscelyn Godwin, “Antiquity Imagined,” in *Athanasius Kircher’s Theatre of the World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009), 99–126.

- *Rare Book & Manuscript Library session.*

8. **ARCHAEOLOGIES** *Reconstructions of an idea*

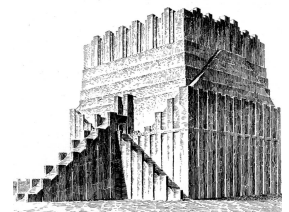
Robert Koldewey, “The Peribolos of Etemenanki: The Tower of Babel,” in *The Excavations at Babylon*, trans. Agnes S. John (London: Macmillan, 1914), 183–97.

Roberto Parapetti, “Babylon 1978–2008: A Chronicle of Events in the Ancient Site,” *Mesopotamia* 43 (2008): 129–66.

Maria Gabriella Micale and Davide Nadali, “‘Layer By Layer . . .’: Of Digging and Drawing,” in *Proceedings of the 51st Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2008), 405–14.

Olof Pedersén, “Work on a Digital Model of Babylon Using Archaeological and Textual Evidence,” *Mesopotamia* 46 (2011): 9–22.

- *Scan the Department of State’s exceedingly long Report on Damage to the Site of Babylon, Iraq (2010), and study Google Earth’s satellite imagery of the site of Babylon, coordinates N 32°32’11”, E 44°25’15”. What does the “view from above” reveal?*



Robert Koldewey,  
Etemenanki  
reconstruction, 1918.

9. **UTOPIA/DYSTOPIA** *Archetype, type, and antitype*

Karsten Harries, “Fantastic Architectures and the Spiritual Significance of Perspective,” in Pedro Azara, Karsten Harries, and Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, eds., *La ciutat que mai no existí* (Barcelona: Centre de Cultura Contemporània, 2003), 149–53.

Massimo Scolari, “The Tower of Babel: Form and Representation,” in *Oblique Drawing: A History of Anti-Perspective*, trans. Jenny Condie Palandri (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 359–74.

Joanne Morra, “Utopia Lost: Allegory, Ruins and Pieter Bruegel’s Towers of Babel,” *Art History* 30, no. 2 (April 2007): 198–216.

Anthony Vidler, “The Third Typology,” *Oppositions* 7 (Winter 1976): 13–16.

»» *In your own words, define type.*

10. **LONDON, PARIS, BERLIN, NEW YORK** *Monumental spectacle*

John D. M. Green, “Visions of Babylon—and Beyond,” *The Art Newspaper* 196 (November 2008): 53.

»» *Without reading cover to cover, compare the content, presentation, and role of architecture in the following exhibition catalogues, on reserve:*

Béatrice André-Salvini, ed., *Babylone* (Paris: Éditions Hazan, 2008).

Günther Schauerte, ed., *Babylon: Mythos und Wahrheit*, 2 vols. (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2008).

Irving Finkel and Michael Seymour, eds., *Babylon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Joan Aruz, Kim Benzel, and Jean M. Evans, eds., *Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium BC* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

11. **METROPOLITAN ANXIETIES** *Babylon, NY*

“High Life in Babel,” *New York Times*, February 21, 1929.

Hugh Ferriss, “The Lure of the City” and “Crowding Towers,” in *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* (New York: Ives Washburn, 1929), 58–63.

Carol Willis, “Drawing Towards Metropolis,” in Hugh Ferriss, *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* (1929; repr., New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1986), 148–84.

Manfredo Tafuri, “The New Babylon: The ‘Yellow Giants’ and the Myth of Americanism,” in *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 171–89.

»» *Watch Fritz Lang’s Metropolis (Babelsberg, Germany: Universum Film, 1927), 148 minutes.*

12. **THE LIBRARY AND BABEL** *Architectural metaphor and its literary classifications*

Victor Hugo, bk. 5 chap. 1, “Abbas Beati Martini,” and chap. 2, “This Will Kill That,” in *Notre-Dame de Paris* [1831], trans. Isabel F. Hapgood (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1888), 1:180–206.

Franz Kafka, “The Great Wall of China” [1917], trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, in *The Great Wall of China and Other Pieces* (London: Martin Secker, 1933), 136–59.

Jorge Luis Borges, *The Library of Babel* [1941], trans. Andrew Hurley, ill. Erik Desmazières (Jaffrey, NH: David R. Godine, 2000).

»» *Refer to Neil MacGregor, A History of the World in 100 Objects (New York: Viking, 2011), xiii–xxvi and 90–94. On a single sheet of paper, write an entry on the Tower of Babel, using as point of departure either Hans Schlottheim’s ca. 1600 “rolling ball clock” (now in the Grünes Gewölbe, Dresden), or a comparable object. Think of this as a single-page summary of the course’s content.*



Bailey44, Tower of Babel dress, 2013.

*And they said,  
Go to, let us build us a city  
and a tower, whose top  
may reach unto heaven;  
and let us make us a name.*