

Course Syllabus

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The Architectures of Coal Country

Columbia University GSAPP / Spring 2019

Mondays, 11am–1pm / Avery 504

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w/ Amelyn Ng, research assistant

What more possibly needs to be said about coal? As we digest the latest report from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the facts around coal's participation in that warming remain as clear as ever. To cite but one among a litany of statistics that make the case, in the United States, coal emissions last year accounted for over 2/3 of carbon dioxide emissions from the electric power sector while providing less than 1/3 of its electricity. In response to such evident realities—and to the widespread decline of coal employment generally, thanks to automation and mountaintop removal methods—a familiar alliance of cynical politics and industrial profiteering offers the figure of the out-of-work coal miner, a proud but benighted character who has taken on an outsized role in recent political discourse. Coal remains a central object of rhetorical debate and one of the chief contributors to our ongoing crisis of climate, and thus demands close examination as it is consigned, sooner or later, to history. This seminar will ask what architectural thought brings to such debates:

What forms will that history take? Where will its archives be kept, and what goes in them? Can they illuminate for us that complex “web of exploitation” that has shaped the region for the past 150 years? How have the architectures of coal been reused, restored, or exhibited? What settlement patterns (spatially and socially) did coal engender in the twentieth century, and how might we think about them in the twenty-first? How might atmospheric data, settler colonialism, labor struggles, geology, extractive corporate capitalism, and folk culture be read through each other? In short, what are the architectures, broadly construed, of these extractive landscapes, historically and at present?

This course is intended to be both seminar and workshop. As a seminar, we will explore the longstanding relationship of architecture and geology, we will acquaint ourselves with texts concerning coal and political geology, and we will think about the buildings and landscapes of Appalachia. Across the semester, each participant in the

seminar will also be developing their own project, which will constitute the workshop aspect. Each project will entail in-depth research and analysis of some kind, and each will work within a selected medium (drawings, pamphlet, website, video) to imagine a public outcome for that research.

** NOTE: Because of the workshop structure, enrollment will be capped at twelve. Should the numbers exceed that there will be an application after the first class.

** ALSO NOTE: Students must attend the first class to enroll, unless you have prior permission from James to miss the first class.

Expectations:

During seminar weeks (of which there are six), I'd like to receive one-page reading responses the evening before, which include your thoughts and prompts for conversation. These will comprise 25% of final grade.

Contribution to our seminar discussions will comprise another 25%. Please note that this is not *attendance* but *contribution*, I expect vigorous and collegial discussions.

Research projects will be 50% of the final grade. There will be an early "midterm review" where preliminary ideas will be presented, and the final three weeks of the semester will be for final presentations.

1. Introduction (January 28)
2. Geology, Enlightenment, Colonization, Architecture (February 4)
3. Geology in Nineteenth-Century Architecture (February 11)
4. Preliminary Pinup for Research Projects (February 18)
5. Guest Speaker TBD (February 25)
6. Appalachia (March 4)
7. Kinne Week, no class (March 11)
8. Spring Break, no class (March 18)
9. Political Geology (March 25)
10. Extraction Landscapes (April 1)
11. Student Presentations (April 8)
12. Student Presentations (April 15)
13. Student Presentations (April 22)

Suggested topics for research projects will be provided.