ARCH A6801 - Structural Daring and the Sublime in Pre-modern Architecture

Many works of pre-modern architecture are daring, poised at the very edge of structural stability. Others are well-supported, but strive to give an illusion of precariousness or even of levitation. This seminar invites students to explore the sublime effects of precarious architecture through visual and literary representations, as well as simulation models that examine the dynamic behavior of ancient and medieval monuments. Discussion topics will include: the *a priori* and culturally specific aspects of daring architecture; the ancient and medieval sense of the sublime and aesthetics; environmental psychology; and strategies for reading architectural forms. Students will present two or three readings during the semester, participate in class discussions, and write a short midterm essay and a final research paper.

Important Note: This seminar is limited to 18 students. If more than this express interest following the first class meeting, students will be asked to submit a statement of interest (due Friday, Sept. 9th) to help determine who will remain in the seminar.

Time: Wednesdays, 11:00-1:00 PM
Room: 300 Avery Hall
Instructor: Rory O’Neill
  ro32@columbia.edu

**Sep 7:** 1. An Introduction to Structural Daring and to the Sublime

**Sep 14:** 2. Heavy Architecture I: Ancient Works


**Sep 21:** 3. Heavy Architecture II: Medieval Works


---

**Sep 28 4. Height, Light and Levitation** *(First student presentations)*


---

**Oct 5 5. Gothic Structure**


Oct 12 6. **Patrons and Desires**

Procopius, Vol. 7: *On Buildings* (London; Cambridge, Mass, 1940), Book 1, Ch 1


Oct 19 7. **Midterm Paper Presentations**

Present your ideas for the midterm essay (in 5 minutes or less). Please bring several images for your discussion. The essay itself is due on Wednesday, October 26th and should be no more than 3 double-spaced pages. In the essay choose one or more pre-modern works of art and/or architecture (and possibly a modern work for comparative analysis) and discuss your observations on structural daring in the use of components such as slender supports, spans, and overhangs). You should also consider sublime responses generated from the work/s related to vertigo, levitation, precariousness and gigantism.

Oct 26 8. **Space and Place: Phenomenology of Architecture**


Nov 2 9. **The Medieval and Modern Senses of the Sublime**


Nov 9. **Fear, Medieval Precaria and Precarious Space**


Nov 16 11. **Sculpture and Precarious Intentions**


Nov 23 12. **Distribution of Daring**


Nov 30 13. **Final Paper Presentations**

Present your ideas for your final research paper (~10 minutes). Please bring several images for your discussion. The paper itself is due on Friday, December 26 and should be no more than 10 double-spaced pages. In the paper, explore some aspect of structural daring in a work or works of pre-modern architecture and its historical or modern sublime response.

Dec 7 14. **Final Paper Presentations**

(Continued)

Dec 16  **Final Papers Due**