



Model of HSBC Headquarters by Foster Associates being tested under an “artificial sun,” c. 1983. Photo © Richard Davies. Foster + Partners Archives.

ARCH 3308/6308 - 132

Special Topics in Architectural Theory: Configurations of the Technical

- Instructor: Alexandra Quantrill
- Time: W 2:00-5:00pm
- Location: AAP NYC, 26 Broadway, 20th Floor
- Credits: 3

This seminar aims to destabilize and reconfigure the category of technology in architecture. It tests a range of conceptual frameworks for thinking through relations between technology, ecology, and society in the making of the built environment. While the technical aspects of architectural production have largely been kept separate from theoretical discourse, it is clear that technologies used to construct our buildings, cities, and landscapes are entangled with various contemporary concerns, from labor rights and social justice to climate and the global economic system. In this course we will reconsider how to analyze the technical composition of building systems such as facade enclosures and environmental regulation mechanisms, as well as urban infrastructure, expanding our purview to consider material lifecycles, energy consumption, and the nexus of professional expertise and manual craft. To assess how technics and aesthetics inform one another within our discipline, we will study extant discourses on precision, optimization, and specification. We will draw from analyses of material culture developed in media theory, anthropology, political economy, sociology, and the history of science and technology. We will ask how technologies can operate as political instruments. When do technical standards and norms within the constructed environment function to shape social categories such as male/female or able/disabled, or to deepen racial and economic divides? How might we resist insidious forms of exclusion through reconceiving technical practices? The seminar positions the construction of the built environment within the context of the anthropocenic turn, querying historical distinctions between natural and artificial environments, and human and nonhuman subjects. Through select readings, large and small group discussion, critical writing exercises, and research on building systems, students will rethink the technical in architecture.