Architecture 4050/5050

Specification and Invention: The Metal Building in an Expanded Field

School of Architecture UNC Charlotte - Fall 2022
Hours: T 6:00 - 8:30 p.m.
Instructor: Greg Snyder (gsnyder@uncc.edu)

> *"Metal buildings are the dream that Modern Architects had at the beginning of the century finally come true, but they themselves don't realize it. That's because it doesn't take an architect to build a metal building. You just order it out of a catalogue. You just pick the color, the size that you want, number of square feet, style, what you need it for. It comes with a bunch of guys. They put it together in a couple of days. Maybe a week. There you go. You're all set to go into business. Just slap a sign in front."*
>
> David Byrne from **True Stories**

Premise

The heyday of the ironic observation on the metal building may have past 40 years ago, but the ubiquity of the metal building is still an issue that has weight in the physical and cultural landscape that we operate in today to the extent that the discipline of Architecture is obliged to understand it, and address it critically. Within the critical appraisal of the metal building there is **an opportunity to engage the broad topics of material culture, the influence of industrialized manufacturing on building design, and the role that prefabrication and assembly strategies might play in design thinking at this moment in time.** This seminar uses the metal building as a catalyst to expand and intensify the appreciation of some historical, theoretical, and technical questions that we contend with in the pursuits of Architecture and building design at this moment in time. The seminar's lecture and project sequence aim to elevate the students' understanding and appreciation of the larger contexts through which something as common and ubiquitous as the metal building can have the capacity to communicate meaning through the rhetoric of the tectonic and the detail, while also facilitating formal expression that is not limited to the conventional application of the system and its attendant componentry that is too familiar. The careful examination of the metal building can contribute to a breadth in knowledge that is both applicable to a considered understanding of its emergence and evolution, but it also reveals opportunities for the articulated metal building to contribute more productively to the contemporary discourse on culture, architecture, and building design. **This course is as much about design and construction at this moment in time as it is a specific investigation of the metal building.**

Objective

The seminar will provide a framework for the students to develop a polemical position on how the metal building system, situated within a critical understanding of contemporary architecture, can be used as a design solution for projects that aspire to be **A**rchitecture (yes, capitol "A" Architecture). The lectures will introduce the topic in a broad context, while the students' work will research the topic with greater specificity and detail. The resulting insights should include developed design sensibilities and processes informed by a thoughtful understanding of contexts that include historical, cultural, technical, formal and spatial parameters.

Method

The seminar will be comprised of weekly lectures delivered by the instructor, case studies researched by the students, a brief design/build exercise at the scale of furniture, and an individual submission to the 2022 Metal Building Manufacturer Association sponsored Metal Building Design Competition: (https://www.mbmaeducation.org/) at the end of the semester. A class trip to the Nucor metal building plant in Swansea, SC is anticipated, as well as site visits to the instructor's metal building project that is underway in Mount Pleasant, NC. Your hands might get dirty and your shoes scuffed.

Content

Selected readings will be used to inform the cultural, historical, and design discourses that the seminar will investigate: reading and analysis will be a significant component of the semester's experience. The list of readings is expansive and diverse – they will range from Sigfried Giedion on Mechanization, to Kenneth Frampton on tectonics, to Kieran and Timberlake on fabrication, to Umberto Eco on hyper-reality, to Ben Nicholson on collage, and Levi-Strauss on the bricoleur.