

Architecture 7103

**Specification and Invention: The Metal Building in an Expanded Field**

School of Architecture UNC Charlotte - Fall 2018

Hours: M W F 2:00 - 5:30 p.m.

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*"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 35 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 exploit it as a pedagogical instrument that engages several topics integral to the education of the architect. This studio studies the metal building in order to illustrate a framework for addressing historical, theoretical, and design questions that can be posited in order to activate the development of a more dimensional understanding of something that is seemingly straight-forward, uncomplicated, and banal. The studio project sequence aims to elevate the students' understanding and appreciation of the metal building system as something that has 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, but also reveals opportunities for the articulated metal building to contribute more productively to the contemporary cultural discourse.

## **Objective**

The aspiration for this studio is to develop a body of research that is an effective "portrait" of the current discourse on the metal building – the quality of the research should be able to stand alone as documentation and analysis worthy of publication. The research will be used to inform two resulting building designs that will simultaneously address rich and complex conceptual issues related to the culture that we build in at this point in time, and be developed to a degree of detail that demonstrates that they are propositions that are informed by an understanding of materials, construction, assembly, and performance.

## **Method**

The studio will be comprised of an initial research endeavor to examine the contexts and current status of manufacturing and prefabrication building systems and componentry as a means to cultivate a critical position on the metal building system and its allies. The research will be followed by a case study with a brief charrette to design a response to a simple program using a readily available metal building profile. This project will interrogate the metal building system in service of a deeper understanding of the systemic logic of the materials and construction, and frame the metal building in the discourse of Material Culture. The final project will be a design for a hybrid building that accommodates a number of distinct, but possibly related programs in an urban site. The "cross-programming" and influence of a dynamic urban site will be a vehicle to examine the capacity of the metal building system to be responsive to the array of demands that might be encountered in the practice of Architecture and making buildings at this point in time in culture and in history.

## **Content**

Selected readings will be used to inform the cultural, historical, and design discourses that the studio 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 Kieran and Timberlake on fabrication, to Umberto Eco on hyper-reality, to Ben Nicholson on collage, and Kenneth Frampton on tectonics.