

## Sessions at SAH (Providence, 24–28 Apr 19)

Providence, Rhode Island, USA, Apr 24–28, 2019

Deadline: Jun 5, 2018

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72nd Annual International Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians

[\[1\]](#) Panel at SAH 2019: Architectural Fallout from Moral Failure

[\[2\]](#) The Spatial, Visual, & Social Effects of Surface in Architecture

[\[1\]](#) Panel at SAH 2019: Architectural Fallout from Moral Failure

Peter Sealy

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Panel: "Architectural Fallout from Moral Failure"

Session Co-Chairs: Nathaniel Walker, The College of Charleston, and Peter Sealy, University of Toronto

In their quest to locate historical meaning in architectural form, designers and scholars have long assigned moral positions to buildings. Whole styles, such as the Gothic or the Baroque, have been charged with dishonesty, while specific buildings have also been publically indicted for perceived vices. Ornament has been accused of intractable criminality, while its absence has been derided as puritanical.

The problems of linking human morality and architecture are inseparable from questions of culpability and victimhood, and thus produce a series of seemingly intractable questions: if a building is "evil," whose fault is it? How, precisely, can architecture cause suffering? Can a depraved architect design a good building for an awful client? Can a morally corrupt building or space be redeemed? What happens when a good building turns bad—when new information comes to light, or old information acquires new meaning? This last question is of particular relevance in the present, as people of conscience grapple with the histories of exploitation woven throughout our built environment.

We invite papers that critically explore the problem of moral failure in architecture around the world, particularly its reception by individuals, the public, governments, scholars, and design professionals. There are many potentially productive angles from which to address this topic, ranging from studies of specific buildings that are demolished or shunned due to their associations with moral catastrophe, to the apologetic interpretation of the work of architects known for personal moral failure. Studies of built or unbuilt works tied to the fictional narratives of literature or film are also very welcome, as they offer rare glimpses of buildings that are deliberately crafted to convey moral failure, and can thus shed a great deal of light on the ways that people have viewed, and continue to view, the ethics of architecture in the real world.

The 72nd Annual International Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians will take place on April 24–28, 2019 in Providence, Rhode Island. Applicants must submit a 300-word abstract and CV

through the online portal of the Society of Architectural Historians (<http://www.sah.org/2019>).

Further details of the submission guidelines are available at [www.sah.org](http://www.sah.org). Please do not send materials directly to the panel co-chairs. Submission of proposals to the SAH online portal closes at 11:59 on June 5, 2018 (Central Daylight Time).

[2] The Spatial, Visual, & Social Effects of Surface in Architecture

Kristin Schroeder

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Session Chairs: Kristin Schroeder, University of Virginia

Alice Isabella Sullivan, Lawrence University

This panel seeks to consider, through a variety of case studies spanning from the early modern period through the present, and from diverse geographic regions, the relationships between structures and their surfaces. Built forms announce their material presence or become dematerialized as a result of different cladding techniques. From textiles to stone ornaments, and from stained glass to painted exteriors, these various treatments inflect the way we interpret spatial and visual constructs in our built environment.

The history of architecture is rife with striking examples. In Central Asia, decorative brickwork techniques created the illusion that the facades of mosques, palaces, and tombs were intricately woven, as if cloaked in fossilized textiles. The painted and/or carved surfaces of medieval buildings called into question the architectonic structures beneath. Features such as flying buttresses, rib vaults, and colorful stained-glass clerestory windows complicate the physicality of Gothic cathedrals, giving way to impressions of lightness. In the modern period, the architect Gottfried Semper made cladding central to his theory of spatial enclosures, a concept that would later inspire the thin-skinned glass and steel skyscrapers of Mies van der Rohe. Most recently, the flammable cladding that exacerbated the fire at London's Grenfell Tower provides an instructive case on the connections between surface, inequality, and the failing accountability of both private and public agencies.

Whether functional or aesthetic, cladding can reveal or hide the tectonic and representational realities of built forms. We invite speakers to propose work through which they explore the theoretical, practical, and/or social implications of surface in architecture around the globe and throughout history from critical perspectives. Of interest for this session are projects that work across media and disciplines to expand, challenge, or provide new insights into the relationships between architecture and its surfaces.

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Reference:

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