

Modular Men: Architects, labour and standardisation in mid-20th century Britain

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In 1953 the Modular Society was set up to promote the use of a standardised module as the key to industrialised building, and as a means to ensure that the architect remained in control of both design and production. Their approach, predicated on the conviction that building can be split into a series of simple, separate tasks, undertaken by a semi-skilled workforce, has since become the hegemonic understanding of the British construction process. Politically engaged architects on the left also supported standardisation as a basis for an industrialised building and as an opportunity for new technical processes to enhance working conditions and collaboration between architects and builders. The voice of organised labour was largely excluded from these debates. This paper analyses the social world of the building site, its site processes and social hierarchies, at a time of rapid technical change and argues that the potential for a highly skilled workforce, working with technologically advanced products, remains dependent on wider social reforms.

Biography:

Dr. Christine Wall is Reader in the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, University of Westminster. She recently completed a Leverhulme Trust funded project *Constructing Post-War Britain: Building workers' stories 1950-70* and published *An Architecture of Parts: Architects, building workers and industrialisation in Britain* (Routledge: 2013).