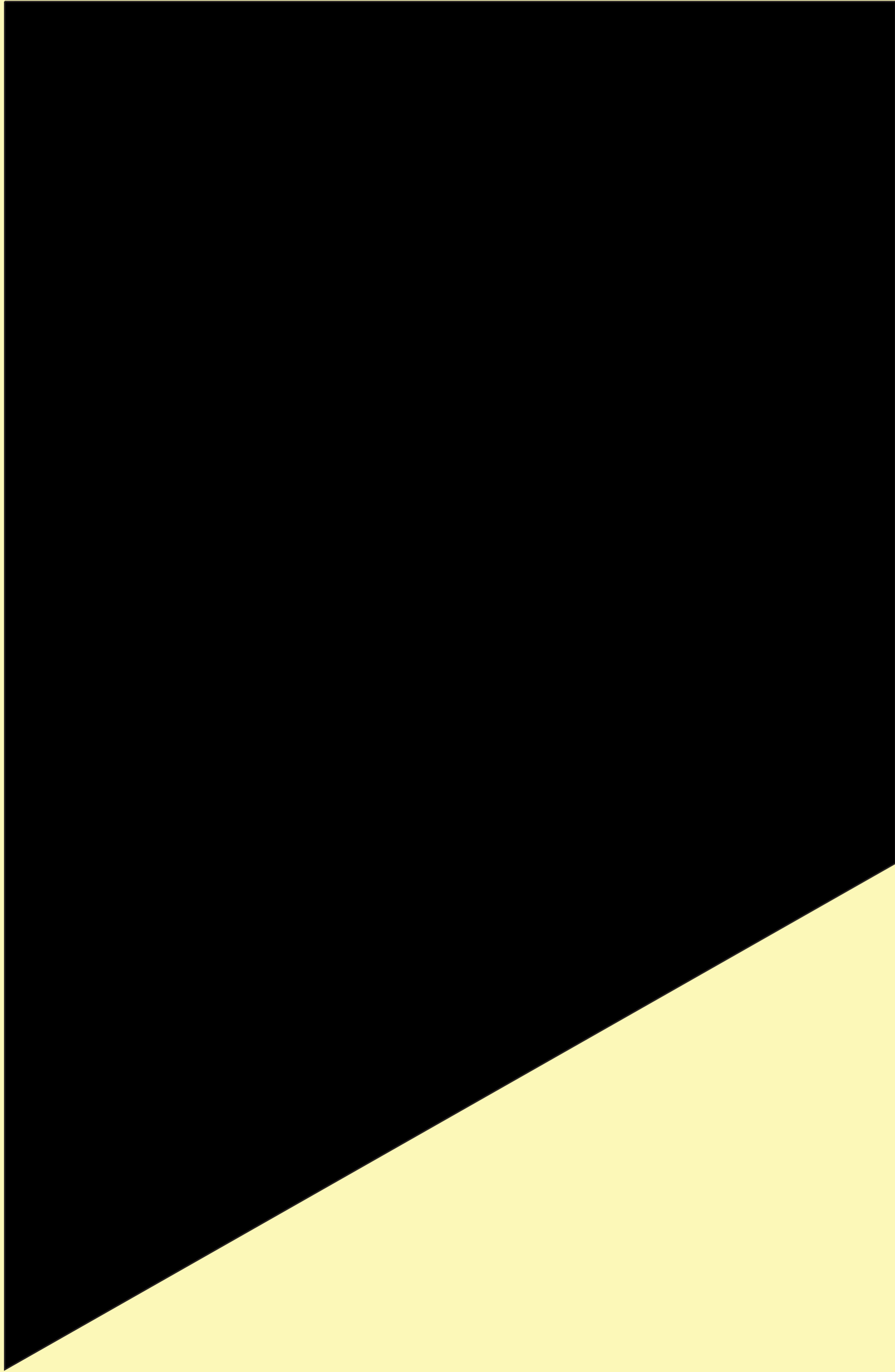


How is architecture made? ‘Revolutionize Construction’ unpacks the political economy of construction, examining who commissions, finances, and builds—interrogating architects’ roles. It explores how current systems might be revolutionized toward a post-extractive architecture.



Revolutionize Construction

Spring 2026 Design Studio BA6, MA2 (Malterre-Barthes)
More on IS-Academia and riot.today

Revolutionize Construction
Spring 2026 Design Studio

Mondays and Tuesdays

Monday: 10:00-12:00, 13:00-18:00
Tuesday: 10:00-12:00, 15:00-18:00

Office Hours as requested

Credits: 12 ECTS

Location: Varies, See Studio Schedule
Studio Space: SG 2211 - Studio Space

This class is taught in English

Teaching Team:

Charlotte Malterre-Barthes (charlotte.malterrebarthes@epfl.ch); Elif Erez-Henderson (elif.erez@epfl.ch); Antoine Iweins (antoine.iweinsdeckhoutte@epfl.ch); Nathalie Marj (nathalie.marj@epfl.ch)

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Student Assistants:
Eva Oustric (eva.oustric@epfl.ch);
Lydia Genecand (lydia.genecand@epfl.ch)

Course Description:

“While the construction industry participates energetically in the economic engine which is the base, architecture operates in the realm of culture, allowing capital to do its work without its effects being scrutinized.” Peggy Deamer, “Introduction,” in *Architecture and Capitalism: 1845 to the Present*, ed. Peggy Deamer (London: Routledge, 2014), 1–2.

Clients, investors, and construction companies—‘Revolutionize Construction’ is interested in unpacking and challenging how architecture is made, specifically the political economy of construction, including who commissions, finances, and constructs architecture and the role of architects within this construction ecology. The construction sector represents a US\$10 trillion annual expenditure on construction goods and services, contributing 13% to global GDP and employing 7% of the worldwide workforce. Yet this industry—responsible for 40% of global carbon emissions, 70% of material consumption, and concealing 18% of forced labor victims—operates through obscured power structures and invisible externalities absent from balance sheets.

In Switzerland, the construction industry represents approximately 9% of GDP and employs over 500,000 people. Yet the sector operates through opaque networks of subcontracting, international supply chains extracting materials from toxic sites globally, speculative development models driven by pension fund investments, and procurement

systems that prioritize cost and speed over all else. The industry is simultaneously a major contributor to carbon emissions (embodied and operational), a site of labor exploitation (particularly of precarious workers), and a vehicle for capital accumulation through land and property speculation—all wrapped under the invisible cloak of sustainability.

To truly engage with the climate crisis, housing inequity, and labor justice, we must understand the flows of capital (68% of capital invested yearly in space production), how contractors operate, how insurance companies constrain material choices, and how financial and regulatory instruments shape what gets built. The studio seeks to trace these hidden architectures of construction—the concealed agents operating behind the scenes—not as problems to be solved through design, but as complex material and

political conditions that require new analytical and strategic capabilities. It is by making visible these shadow architectures that we can identify where and how to intervene, to understand these greedy systems and revolutionize them so that a post-extractive architecture can emerge and become prevalent. Informed by this critical research, we will develop projective works that imagine alternative construction ecologies.

Through strategic interventions targeting both systems and buildings, we shall articulate speculative proposals for how architecture might operate within—and against—existing construction frameworks.

Nota Bene: We will work in real-life conditions in the context of Switzerland, with a focus on the EPFL Campus.

This studio is part of the ‘Moratorium on New Construction’ cycle, one of RIOT’s meta agenda seeking to center systemic change in architecture and the building industry. The class will prioritize radical designs that engage with repair, remediation, care, tactical interventions, system design, and policy making, and interrogate architecture as the sole ‘art of building buildings.’ Architecture is here at the forefront, considered both as a problem and as a powerful tool for change, if and when it is used as such. The title of the present studio refers to Chapter 05 of the book *A Moratorium on New Construction* (Malterre-Barthes, Sternberg Press, 2025), understanding that a moratorium is not an end but a beginning—a design brief for reimagining how we commission, finance, construct, maintain, and inhabit our built environment without devastation.



Source:

P. Isotton, *The gentlemen 'builders'*, [redacted] Ans_15312-80-AL aerial photograph, 1955, ETH-Bibliothek, ETH Zürich, E-Pics Image Archive, accessed Jan 6 2026.
[redacted] ACM-EPFL. Fond J. Zweifel, ACMEPFL_0054-0204.

[A] The New Löwen, Glattbrugg
[B] Construction Site, EPFL

RIOT

Research [redacted] Innovation On Territory:
Charlotte Malterre-Barthes, Elif Erez-Henderson,
Summer Islam, Antoine Iweins, Kathlyn Kao,
Nathalie Marj, Saira Mohamed
EPFL Lausanne