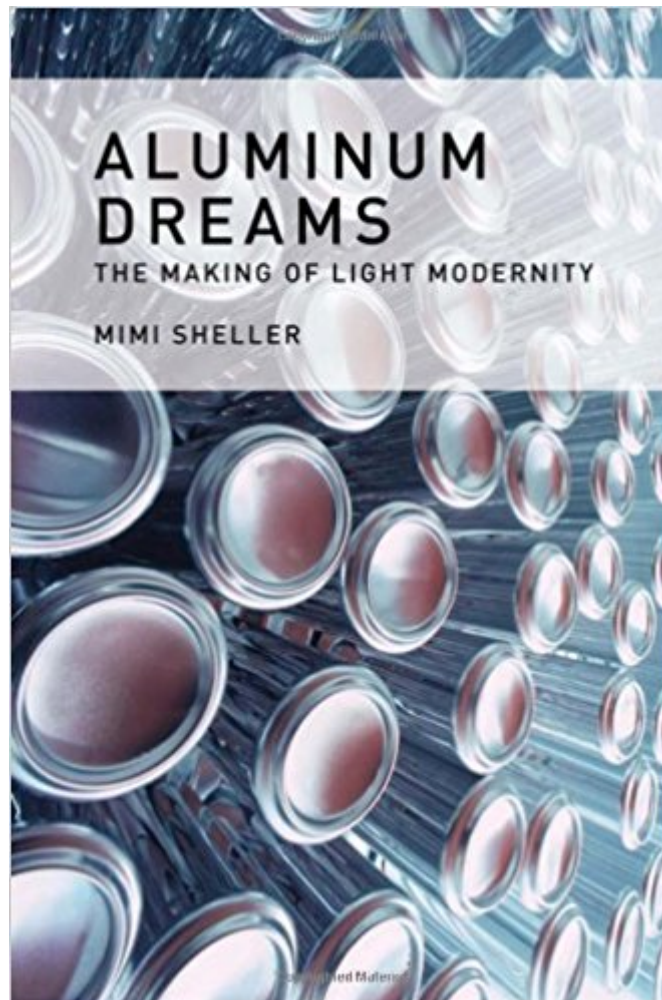


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# Aluminum Dreams: The Making Of Light Modernity (MIT Press)



## Synopsis

Aluminum shaped the twentieth century. It enabled high-speed travel and gravity-defying flight. It was the material of a streamlined aesthetic that came to represent modernity. And it became an essential ingredient in industrial and domestic products that ranged from airplanes and cars to designer chairs and artificial Christmas trees. It entered modern homes as packaging, foil, pots and pans and even infiltrated our bodies through food, medicine, and cosmetics. In *Aluminum Dreams*, Mimi Sheller describes how the materiality and meaning of aluminum transformed modern life and continues to shape the world today. Aluminum, Sheller tells us, changed mobility and mobilized modern life. It enabled air power, the space age and moon landings. Yet, as Sheller makes clear, aluminum was important not only in twentieth-century technology, innovation, architecture, and design but also in underpinning global military power, uneven development, and crucial environmental and health concerns. Sheller describes aluminum's shiny utopia but also its dark side. The unintended consequences of aluminum's widespread use include struggles for sovereignty and resource control in Africa, India, and the Caribbean; the unleashing of multinational corporations; and the pollution of the earth through mining and smelting (and the battle to save it). Using a single material as an entry point to understanding a global history of modernization and its implications for the future, *Aluminum Dreams* forces us to ask: How do we assemble the material culture of modernity and what are its environmental consequences? *Aluminum Dreams* includes a generous selection of striking images of iconic aluminum designs, many in color, drawn from advertisements by Alcoa, Bohn, Kaiser, and other major corporations, pamphlets, films, and exhibitions.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Aluminum Dreams spans the globe in order to explain how one light, bright metal has made the modern age, and has made modernity simultaneously wonderful and terrible. This superb commodity study brilliantly carries forward the legacy of Sidney Mintz's pioneering Sweetness and Power. (Joyce E. Chaplin, James Duncan Phillips Professor of Early American History, Harvard University, and author of Round About the Earth: Circumnavigation from Magellan to Orbit)Through revealing graphics and polished prose, Aluminum Dreams delivers the retro pleasures of artifacts now gone by, but then--with the enticement well in hand--shows how oligopolies, war, and global exploitation follow on. It is a tour de force of cultural-material analysis, successful at many registers including the satisfactions of a mind-expanding reading experience. (Harvey Molotch, author of Where Stuff Comes From)Mimi Sheller has produced a wonderful account of the light, bright, silvery metal that has become so central to the sleek modern world. Her shimmering story of 'aluminum dreams' links the very centers of global power, mobility, and communications with other places of abject poverty and environmental degradation. (John Urry, Distinguished Professor of Sociology, Lancaster University)

Mimi Sheller is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for Mobilities Research and Policy at Drexel University. She is the author of Democracy after Slavery, Consuming the Caribbean, and Citizenship from Below.

Sheller takes a commonly used metal, aluminum, out of the recycling bin, and surprises us with a wealth of information about its sources, production and uses, and most importantly the sociological and economic influence it brings to bear on our lives.

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