

AHRA 2012

9th International Architectural Humanities
Research Association Conference

Architecture and the Paradox of Dissidence

15–17 November 2012

London Metropolitan University
Faculty of Architecture and Spatial Design

Synopsis

This conference aims to reflect on the relevance of the concept of dissidence for architectural practice today. Although dissidence has been primarily associated with architectural practices in the Eastern Bloc at the end of the Cold War period, contemporary architectural and other aesthetic practices have in recent years developed a host of new methodologies and techniques for articulating their distance from and critique of dominant political and financial structures. Architecture and the Paradox of Dissidence asks how we can conceive of the contemporary political problems and paradoxes of architecture in relation to their precedents? Devoid of the agency of action, Cold War dissidents articulated their positions in drawings of fantasy-like paper architecture, while contemporary forms of architectural practice seem to gravitate towards activism and direct-action in the world. The political issues – from interventions in charged areas worldwide to research in conflict zones and areas undergoing transformations – currently stimulate a field of abundant invention in contemporary architecture. Both, Cold War dissidents and contemporary activists encounter problems and paradoxes and must navigate complex political force fields within which possible complicities are inherent risks.

New forms of critical practice, and political and spatial dissent are manifold, appearing in stark contrast to contemporary architectural practice in which professional courage seems to have been translated into structural “virtuosity” of surfaces. This conference seeks to map out and expand on the methodologies of architectural action and reinvigorate the concept of dissent within the architectural/spatial field of the possible. A more historical thread that runs through the programme will seek to weave the genealogy of political/spatial practices from the Cold War dissidents of the Soviet Bloc to the activists of South American favelas.

Dissidents in the former communist countries used a specific set of codes to question the ideological doctrine of the state party. Architects who were otherwise employed in state run architectural collectives, or as staff in architecture schools met to produce writings, private lectures, secret installations and architectural articulations of allegories and legends – activities that challenged the ‘stifling’ standardized language of Soviet architecture. Many of these ‘paper architects’ questioned the relationship between art, architecture and politics, but also, and significantly so, the ideological, and thus also ethical function of various forms of ‘creative practices’. The political melt-down of the Soviet Bloc reconfigured this complex field of political codes, architectural gestures and references. The withdrawal of the architect from large ideological concepts regarding social utopias mirrored that fragmentation and dissemination of (neo)liberal market structures. Large ideological battles were replaced with a multiplicity of local, or issue-specific conflicts within which forms of activism have been integrated. Dissent against large integrated and complex networks is no longer possible. All that is left is to navigate the complex fields of forces in a reflective and innovative manner. But can the assemblage of gestures and techniques of past struggles and ‘dilemmas’ of working in politically suppressive regimes help to inform those of today?

The conference thus seeks to attract contemporary spatial practitioners, architects, urbanists, journalists, activists, filmmakers and curators, asking them to reflect upon contemporary forms and conditions of dissent and their potential problems and inevitable paradoxes. It welcomes, too, the reflections of architects and architectural historian upon previous articulations of political dissent through architectural practice.

Call for papers

The 2012 AHRA Conference Architecture and the Paradox of Dissidence hosted by the Faculty of Architecture and Spatial Design, London Metropolitan University is both historical and contemporary in attempting to register transformations within architectural practice in relation to politics. Its scope extends from the dissident architects of the soviet bloc to contemporary critical spatial practices. We invite papers on and by architects, architectural theorists and also artists and filmmakers and other spatial practitioners that discuss or propose gestures of refusal that would be relevant for the field of architecture.

Papers might address the following themes and questions:

How can specific narratives of architectural dissent and their paradoxes be relevant today? +++ How can critique be mobilized through architecture, built, unbuilt or refused altogether? +++ How can we think of architectural practices as important vehicles of political action? Can architects challenge professional/political conventions, via the built, the drawn or the modelled? +++ How can we, using the concept of dissidence, understand, theorize and complicate the meaning of practice? +++ How can critical positions be part of a discussion in architectural education? +++ How has the figure of the dissident been used and mis-used by various regimes? How have dissidents of one regime become complicit to a new hegemony?

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Deadline for abstracts of papers (500 words)

15 March 2012

Please send proposals to:

Dr. Ines Weizman

info@dissidence.org.uk

Proposals in English of no more than 500 words including a title should summarize the subject and the premise. Please include name, professional affiliation (if applicable), address, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail address, and a current CV. Proposals and short CVs should be submitted by e-mail, including the text in both the body of the e-mail and in the attachment.

Conference Director
Ines Weizman
Architect and Theorist, Senior Lecturer,
London Metropolitan University

Keynote speakers

Alexander Brodsky
Architect and Artist, Moscow

David Crowley
Art Historian and Theorist,
Professor and Head of Department of Critical Writing in Art & Design,
Royal College of Art, London

Keller Easterling
Architect and Theorist, Associate Professor,
Yale School of Architecture

Felicity D. Scott
Historian and Theorist, Assistant Professor of Architecture,
Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation
at Columbia University

Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss
Architect and Theorist, Assistant Professor,
Tyler School of Art & Architecture,
Temple University Philadelphia

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School of Architecture, University of
Sheffield

Milica Tomic
Artist, Belgrade

Eyal Weizman
Architect and Theorist, Professor,
Centre for Research Architecture,
Goldsmiths, University of London

Registration Timetable

10 January 2012

Call for Papers

15 March 2012

Deadline for abstracts of papers (500 words)

Please send proposals to:

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30 April 2012

Notification of acceptance

1 June 2012

Registration opens

1 September 2012

Submission of summary paper based on abstract

(1000-2000 words)

1 October 2012

Submission of complete text of the paper

15 December 2012

Submission of full paper proposals for publication (approx. 5000 words)

Conference Timetable

Thursday 15 November 2012

Conference opens at 6.00pm

+ Keynote lecture (open to all, but reservation essential)

+ Welcoming reception

Friday 16 November 2012

Full day of papers with presentations from keynote speakers.

+ Conference dinner

Saturday 17 November 2012

Full day of papers with presentations from keynote speakers.

+ Closing remarks

Venue

Faculty of Architecture and Spatial Design

London Metropolitan University

Spring House

40-44 Holloway Road

London N7 8JL

Registration

Registration opens 1 July 2012

Early Bird registration ends 31 August 2012

All speakers and participants in the conference are required to register – see registration fees below. Delegates are responsible for making their own travel and accommodation arrangements.

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Full participation fee

Includes: Opening Keynote Lecture 15 November; delegate pack; lunches, teas & coffees; 'Peripheries' (published by Routledge), the book resulting from the 2011 International AHRA conference

Early Bird: £180

Late Registration: £220

Conference Dinner*: £50

Registration for one day

Please indicate which date you will attend (16 or 17 November 2012)

Includes: Opening Keynote Lecture 15 November (explicit reservation essential); delegate pack; lunch, teas & coffees; 'Peripheries' (published by Routledge), the book resulting from the 2011 International AHRA conference

Early Bird one-day registration: £100

Late one-day registration: £130

Conference Dinner*: £50

Registration for students**

Student ID required for registration

Includes: Opening Keynote Lecture 15 November (explicit reservation essential); delegate pack; lunches, teas & coffees; 'Peripheries' (published by Routledge), the book resulting from the 2011 International AHRA conference

Early Bird: £60

Late Registration: £90

Conference Dinner*: £50

* Reservations for the Conference Dinner on Friday 16 November 2012 need to be received by 15 October 2012.

** Students of [London Metropolitan University](#) may attend the conference for free but need to contact the organisers to reserve a place.

Bibliography

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- Barbara J. Falk (2003), The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe. Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings, Budapest, New York: CEU-Press
- Michel Feher (2007), Nongovernmental Politics, Zone Books, MIT Press
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- Florian Kossak, Doina Petrescu, Tatjana Schneider, Renata Tyszczyk, Stephen Walker (eds), (2009) Agency: Working With Uncertain Architectures, London: Routledge
- Heinrich Klotz (ed.) (1990), Paper Architecture. New Projects from the Soviet Union, New York: Rizzoli
- Lois Nesbitt (2003), Brodsky & Utkin. The Complete Works, New York: Princeton Architectural Press
- Project Russia (2006), Alexander Brodsky, No 41, 3/ 2006, Moscow
- Jane Rendell, Jonathan Hill, Mark Dorrian, Murray Fraser (2007), Critical Architecture, London: Routledge
- Felicity D. Scott (2007), Architecture or Techno-utopia. Politics after Modernism, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: MIT Press
- James C. Scott (1990), Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts, New Haven, London: Yale University Press
- Slavoj (ed) Zizek (1994) Mapping Ideology. London: Verso

Links

- AHRA – Architectural Humanities Research Association
<http://www.ahra-architecture.org/>
- Faculty of Architecture and Spatial Design, London Metropolitan University
<http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/architecture/home.cfm>
- National Gallery of Modern Art, Vilnius
<http://www.ic.ndg.lt/index.php?id=238&L=1>
- Russian Utopia a Depository. Museum of Paper Architecture (curator Yuri Avvakumov)
<http://www.utopia.ru/english/>
- Celltexts, Books and other works produced in prison
<http://celltexts.org/>
- Spatial Agency
<http://www.spatialagency.net/database/paper.architects>
- Networking the blog
<http://www.networkingthebloc.blogspot.com/>
- East. Art. Map
<http://www.eastartmap.org>

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