

Encounters in Optimism: *Utopia in a Finite World*

August 25, 26, 27

Biennale Architettura 2016, Venice

Three days of lectures and debates throughout the Giardini



la Biennale di Venezia

15. Mostra
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Partecipazioni Nazionali



Interpretation of Magritte's *Le Château des Pyrénées*

THURSDAY, AUGUST 25

Imagining the Future

German Pavilion
1.00 – 2.45 pm

Keynote debate between **Darran Anderson** (author of *Imaginary Cities*) and **Adrien Verschuere** (Baukunst)

What role does the human imagination play in the creation of our world? The 500th anniversary of the publication of Thomas More's *Utopia* reminds us that societies have often found the need to radically imagine a world beyond the quotidian. But what are the links, if any, between fictional, urban environments and real, inhabited places? During the last century it became increasingly hard to hold on to the idea of Utopia. So why is there today a renewed interest in Utopia? At a time when the ethos of limits and a framework of restraint seems to place restrictions on human ambitions, is utopian thinking still relevant as a tool to imagine the future? Or does it merely represent an escape from the present?

FRIDAY, AUGUST 26

Architecture and Representation

Belgian Pavilion
10.30 am

Discussion with photographers **Filip Dujardin**, **Bas Princen**, **Jan Kempnaers** and **Mark Pimlott**

Photography is usually considered to be an observation of reality, depicting things as they are. Photographs of buildings are visual representations of spatial experiences we can imagine, they allow us to visit places we are not present in. But to photograph is also to appropriate the thing being photographed, by offering a specific perspective on a fragment of reality. What does it mean to photograph a building? And what can photography tell us about architecture which architecture cannot tell itself?

Beauty and Judgment

British Pavilion
2.00 pm

Panel with **Angela Deuber** (ADA), **Adrien Verschuere** (Baukunst), **Andrea Zanderigo** (Baukuh, San Rocco), **Rowan Mackinnon-Pryde** (Reiach & Hall Architects, AE Foundation)

There was a time when architecture was understood as a predominantly aesthetic discipline. That didn't mean that the architect was concerned solely with how buildings looked, but rather that the skill of the architect was to tackle a range of issues related to context and function. These criteria were addressed as an artistic activity, and quality judged according to commonly agreed standards.

Today, as architecture oscillates between two extremes, the pursuit of the icon and the mass production of the mundane, architects seem largely reluctant to discuss beauty or describe and defend their work in aesthetic terms. So how should we explain the collapse of the aesthetic in architecture and the broader cultural dismissal of the importance beauty and individual judgment? At a time when agendas from sustainability to community seem to take precedence, is re-invigorating the case for beauty at best a distraction or simply a utopian dream? And if the pursuit of beauty is to be reclaimed, how can aesthetic judgment go beyond the legacy of postmodernism and the dominance of personal taste and patterns of preference?

Organised by the AE Foundation and drawing on the personal practice of a trio of speakers based in Italy, Switzerland and Belgium, this discussion explores the role of beauty and aesthetics in practice today.

Utopia and the Everyday

Belgian Pavilion
4.00 pm

Discussion with **Ellis Woodman** (Architecture Foundation), **Éric Lapierre** (EL Experience), **Mark Pimlott**, **Bart Verschaffel** (University of Ghent), **Gideon Boie** (BAVO Research), **Paul Vermeulen** (De Smet Vermeulen Architecten), **Christoph Grafe** (Flanders Architecture Institute)

Utopia has often been imagined as a place: an island, a city of lights, a mountain. A place that is separated by water or distance, removed from the messiness of everyday life, where the compromised realities of history are suspended.

Today, however, this projection is no longer tenable when we start to realise the essential finitude of this world. If the world must be thought as an interior, with limitations that become increasingly visible, Utopia can no longer be found in a faraway place, but must be located in the midst of our everyday existence. Perhaps Utopia needs architectural images that abandon the promise of a virgin land, and depart from the layered junkyard our world has become?

Critical Practices

Baltic Pavilion
6.30 pm

Discussion with **Pieterjan Gijs** and **Arnout Van Vaerenbergh** (Gijs Van Vaerenbergh), **Laura Muyldermans**, **Bart Hollanders** (Eagles of Architecture), **Bart Decroos** (Flanders Architecture Institute)

Since Thomas More's publication, the idea of Utopia has been generally conceived as the projection of an ideal society for which to strive for. More's publication, however, also functioned as a vehicle of criticism to offer a different perspective on the existing society. It was precisely through the projection of a society that 'should not' exist according to the social order of the time, that it became possible to question this social order. To reconsider the idea of Utopia today, in a finite world, perhaps means to abandon this ideal dimension and to focus instead on the critical potential of Utopian visions. The utopian dimension in architecture is then not about imagining an ideal city faraway, but about a critical practice of making architecture that 'should not' exist according to the social order of today.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 27

The Baltic Atlas – Book reading

Baltic Pavilion
10.00 am

Book reading and talk with **Dagnija Smilga**, **Johan Tali** and **Jonas Žukauskas** (Baltic curatorial team)

The Baltic Atlas (Sternberg Press) is the publication that accompanies the Baltic Pavilion and explores an open-ended ecology of practices – a forum on what is to come. The Baltic atlas content is composed as a gradient between two questions. The first – “What is possible to imagine?” – focuses on interpretations, fictional stories, analyses, and reflections on the on-going processes, and proposes future projections. The second – “What is possible?” – is an inquiry into the methods, resources, and parameters that define space. An atlas is used as a medium to unravel the multiple ways of seeing the region of the Baltic States as an intensification of networks, agendas and ideas that are relevant on a global scale too. Parallel discourses are positioned next to each other overlaid in an atlas that works in a range of different modes.

Baltoscandia

Nordic Pavilion
11.30 am

Panel with **Dagnija Smilga**, **Johan Tali**, and **Jonas Žukauskas** (Baltic curatorial team) and **James Taylor-Foster** (Nordic curatorial team)

The notion of a unified Baltoscandic geo-political region (known historically as the “NB8”) has been a concept under discussion since the 1920s. First conceptualised to promote a “utopian” Baltic-Scandinavian union—consisting of Finland, Norway, Sweden (represented in the Nordic Pavilion, Giardini), Denmark and Iceland, with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (represented in “The Baltic Pavilion,” Palasport)—plans were dissolved by the dawn of the 21st Century. But the idea of a supra-state persists geographically, geologically, and culturally. While the Nordic Project in Venice has matured over five decades, “The Baltic Pavilion” is brand new. The latter also represents a discursive topic in itself; a facet of the Nordic Project which, over the years, has been gradually eroded and increasingly idealised.

By aligning and assessing the two triumvirates of La Biennale di Venezia—the Nordic Project (1962-present) and the Baltic Pavilion (2016-)—this Salon, between members from each curatorial team and the audience, will evaluate contemporary conditions in order to understand architecture as a mediator between built, cultural and social processes. How do these two tripartite associations respond and relate to contemporary Europe?

Architecture and Migration

German Pavilion
1.00 pm

Discussion with **Tobias Kister** (Feldschneiders + Kister architects), **Jan-Robert Kowaleski** (WBM Housing, Berlin), **Peter Cachola Schmal** (DAM) and curator **Oliver Elser**

Doug Saunders' book *Arrival City: How the Largest Migration in History is Reshaping Our World* has inspired a shift in perspective on immigrant districts—a shift that is also applicable to Germany with the arrival of large numbers of refugees. Although these districts are typically characterized as “problem areas,” they offer residents and new arrivals the most important prerequisites of an Arrival City: affordable housing, access to work, small-scale commercial spaces, good access to public transit, networks of immigrants from the same culture, as well as a tolerant attitude that extends to the acceptance of informal practices. However, before any of the numerous new arrivals can become regular immigrants, there are currently thousands of refugees living in first admittance facilities and shared accommodations across Germany. These events raise a series of important questions for architecture. What happens after refugee architecture? How is it being implemented? Do we face a new wave of affordable social housing?

Building the Social

German Pavilion
3.00 pm

Discussion with **Manuel Herz** (Manuel Herz Architects), **Mo Smit** (COCOCAN) and **Gideon Boie** (BAVO Research)

What are the social responsibilities of architecture? Or rather, what social responsibilities can architecture assume? This encounter with ‘embedded architects’ will focus on the spatial, urban and economic conditions of migrant communities in Bandung, Jerusalem and the Western Sahara. These projects raise important questions on what the opportunities and limitations are for architecture as a social practice.

Constructing the City

German Pavilion
5.00 pm

Discussion with **Tony Fretton** (Tony Fretton Architects), **Ewald Engelen** (University of Amsterdam), **Christoph Grafe** (Flanders Architecture Research) and **Gideon Boie** (BAVO Research)

How can we construct the city via imaginary architecture? How do fictional visions of the city impact policy and decision-making, and what does this fictionalisation mean for the everyday reality of the city and its inhabitants? A discussion between architects, policy-makers and sociologists will relate these questions and the discussions of the previous days to the way cities are shaped on a policy level and its impact for its material reality.

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